Phra Ācān Khemapatto Bhikkhu
(Luang Pū Lā)

Venerable Lā

autobiography

Dedicated to all those who are working to keep the values of the Thai forest tradition alive for a while longer.

This book is the candid life story of a meditation master of the Thai forest monk tradition, and at the same time a unique historical document.

It is an important reference work for anyone interested in the style of practice of the Great Master Luang Pū Mun Bhūridatto and his immediate disciples.

It is a treasure trove of Khrū Bā Ācān Dhamma of the highest order.

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Translated into English by
Michael Sansom

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Translators' forewords

Mettiko Bhikkhu

On one afternoon in late 1995 I was so fortunate to have the opportunity to meet *Luang Pū**[1] Lā in his monastery, Wat Phū Cõ Kõ. At that time it was unlikely that anyone could have anticipated that Luang Pū would lay down his body just a few weeks later. Surely enough, it was obvious that this body was a wreck, but it did not seem to bother Luang Pū. His mere presence, his tangible *mettā**, triggered showers of *pīti** in several of his visitors.

He gave us a long talk on *Dhamma**, he spoke about *kamma** and its results, and about meditation. But the most important message was conveyed without words: he was the living proof that it is possible to be free from any identification with the body. Luang Pū had severe arthritis, was almost blind, had a weak heart, asthma, and a huge hernia that could only be pushed back inside with the help of a truss and enormous effort. And yet, he called these ailments his "treasures" because they had helped him to open the eye of wisdom in regard to the nature of the body. Just one of them would have been enough to send an ordinary person off into a state of gloom. But Luang Pū was simply no longer an ordinary person (*puthujjana**). Translating his autobiography into German was my way of expressing my gratitude for his teaching.

Three aspects of this autobiography flow seamlessly into one another throughout the entire book. For one, there is the moving account of his life, of his outer and inner journey. Luang Pū Lā's life story impresses with the honesty and openness with which it has been written. No editor ever touched it, there has been no stylistic polishing. And it has been published without any regard for literary conventions. In view of the author's integrity what was there to be corrected anyway?

Secondly, Luang Pū Lā recorded that which constitutes good practice in great detail. This book contains a wealth of descriptions of exemplary behaviour, both on the monastic side, and on the side of lay people. This form of practice was natural in his day, at least for those who considered themselves to be part of that tradition. So we can be even more grateful to Luang Pū Lā that he nevertheless wrote everything down meticulously; because today, in a time when the mindful use of everyday requisites, and polite and humble conduct towards our fellow beings have started to fray in a world of unquestioned networking, the old values are fading into obscurity.

There are some monks in Thailand today, such as Phra Ācān Prīdā "Thui" Chandakaro, who learned to appreciate the benefits of this "old school" in their own practice. For them, Luang Pū Lā's autobiography sets a standard. They value the book as an indispensable reference work, seeing as they were not able to experience the Great Master Luang Pū Mun personally or learn from him directly.

The third aspect of this autobiography consists of deep contemplations of the Dhamma, freed from formal constraints, written down straight from the heart. In these passages in particular Luang Pū Lā often employs poetic ways of expression as well as the use of puns, which could only occasionally be captured in translation. Some of his aphorisms have become established currency in today's *kammaṭṭhāna** circles.

Luang Pū Lā's style of writing goes straight to the heart. His sense of humour flashes through in many places, it's mostly very subtle, occasionally a bit more earthy, but always coupled with deep sincerity and humility in regard to the Dhamma, something he contemplates in a way that is profound and undaunted. Although having studied Dhamma himself, right up to the level of a class one Dhamma expert, it is only personal experience gained through uncompromising practice that counts for him in the end. He abhors any war of opinions based on book knowledge and keenly points out its futility.

In translation there have been no alterations to the text; it has not been adapted to the tastes of a Western readership. Of course, it did then become necessary to provide background information with

the aid of a large number of endnotes, since Luang Pū Lā wrote for Thai readers who are familiar with the forest tradition.

Arranging the many chapters into main sections was done to provide more of an overview. This is not found in the original version. The same holds true for the selection of the quotes at the beginning of each main section.[2] The photos also are not the same as those in the original Thai edition.

This English translation is based on my German version. Of course it would have been preferable to translate directly from the Thai, but, given the fact that Luang Pū was not very well known among Westerners, it would have been difficult to find someone who was able and willing to take on the task. I am glad and grateful that I had Michael Sansom who is as competent for *this* job as I could wish for. I have checked his translation with the Thai original once again. So, the responsibility for any mistakes remains with me.

This does not imply that I wish to boast about my knowledge of Thai; to state it clearly and with gratitude: without the help of Mrs. Patcharaphorn Kaiser I could not have done it. She helped with untangling idiomatic phrases and puns, with filling in cultural background information, and with decrypting old style Thai language.

My deepest gratitude and respect, however, goes to Luang Pū Lā. I raise my hands in *añjali** to my forehead, in memory of the Great old Master.

May this book be a source of information and inspiration for its readers, and may it be of help for their practice.

Michael Sansom

While on a forest walk with Ācān Mettiko in March 2023 he mentioned to me the idea of translating Luang Pū Lā's autobiography into English. Taking on a project like this was daunting, seeing as it was like nothing that I had done before, but I was also instantly drawn to it, honoured to have this opportunity, and within a very short time gladly accepted the project.

Unlike Ācān Mettiko I never met Luang Pū Lā personally, but I knew of him through others and had heard about the energy that he radiated. By taking on this translation I had the wonderful opportunity to get to know this special person; to travel with him on foot through fields and jungle as he recited *Buddho**; to be with him on his inner journey; to witness the inspiring love he had for the Dhamma and to get a taste of the depth of his dedication to the Dhamma. I felt that through spending these days, weeks and months with Luang Pū Lā the Dhamma came closer, and that is a treasure indeed.

For the role Ācān Mettiko played in this process I am truly grateful. It was a central and incredibly important role from day one. To say that he helped me along the way would be a gross understatement. This was a partnership, a working together, a team. He read through my first versions, made suggestions, clarifications and improvements with patience and great generosity, giving so much of his time and energy. His knowledge of the original texts and his deep understanding of cultural and monastic points were indispensable.

I would like to also wholeheartedly thank my wife Helge Sansom for her support and engagement. She was especially helpful in guiding me through more complicated sections and certain nuanced or idiomatic phrases.

Many thanks to both of you.

I wish anyone who reads this autobiography inspiration, joy and growth in the Dhamma and also as they travel along with the Venerable Luang Pū Lā Khemapatto.

For clarification

This biography began with Khuṇ[3] Inthawāy, who approached me and repeatedly asked me to do it (see the text of the book for more details). Subsequently, a group of lay followers of the Buddha's teaching from the capital Bangkok came to me and pleaded with me to give them permission to print the book.

I thought back and forth about it from different angles, and realised that they were indeed determined to print [the biography]. So I gave them permission, because I felt that it would somehow, more or less, be useful in the field of Dhamma.

As far as criticism from people in the world was concerned, this is quite a normal occurrence – and there would be no lack of it. But there were also a few basic principles, namely, not to be cowardly with regard to the good that one is capable of, but rather to be cowardly in the face of the bad – and not to dare commit offences and misconduct. When I had reflected on these things, I was relieved, and then the wisdom arose in my heart to contemplate this. I was ready to give permission to print.

People who print Dhamma books that can serve as a guide, making them available for free, no matter whether in small or large print runs, are usually hard to find, either for financial reasons, or because the confidence, something that is also hard to find, is lacking.

Another aspect is that the biography of a Buddhist normally consists, whenever possible, of highly concentrated suffering in the areas of worldly gain, fame, praise and pleasure. But in contrast, when, for example, good practice and right living are present, then the rank of a true Buddhist is fulfilled, and it becomes a biography of high value. It is better to lose one's life than to lose one's integrity, and also better than to corrupt one's biography.

In the end, it doesn't matter whether this life story is written or not; it is in each one of us because there are no secrets in this world – *natthi loke raho nāma.*[4] Still, it is better to write it down. Those who like to read can read it. The author of his biography has not yet died [at the time of writing this preface], and that is even better because it gives others the opportunity to keep raising objections. (As for true words, they continue to remain true even if one continues to say nothing about them. The more one utters them, the truer they become.)

To conclude this preface in a few words: through the splendour of the Buddha's teaching, may there be well-being everywhere in all three worlds,[5] and at all times.

Phra Lā Khemapatto

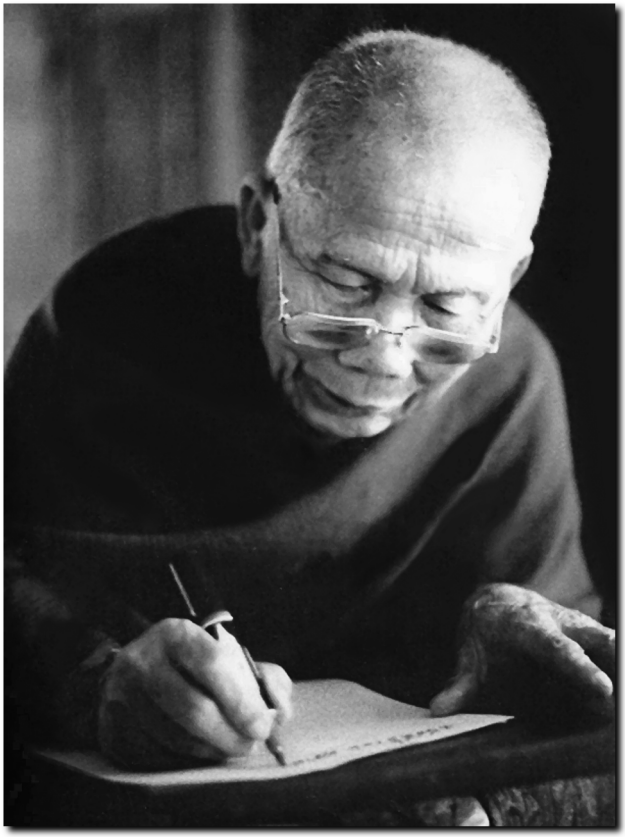
Preface

The story: suffering that passed by
laced with pārami tinkering;
retrospective knowledge: knowledge of past,
expertise in this birth.

Mindfulness knowing about:
work done, word spoken, long ago.
Could also mean:
the whims then, now grasped with wisdom.
Could also mean:
today looks backwards, it takes a look around.
Could also mean:
a good way
to more and more disenchantment with the world.

Introduction

By the way: birth, old age, sickness and death and so on, are by no means a trifling matter. But suffering in the mind and heart in its various forms, is a much greater and more important matter, for which no comparison can be found.



Phra Ācān Lā Khemapatto, ca. 1985

Introduction

Namo me sabbabuddhānaṁ

Namo me sabbasaccadhammānaṁ

Namo me sabbasaṅghānaṁ.

My homage is to all the fully awakened ones, and at the same time to all the noble teachings on the truth, and to all the noble *Saṅghas** of all those fully awakened ones, whether they are remembered by us or not. I am totally committed and dedicated to them, respecting them in every moment. I take them as a refuge, an object of contemplation and veneration, in order to completely extinguish all suffering in this life.

People who, in every respect, are of a higher mind and of fine qualities may take note: bumblebees and bees do not get bored of feasting on and enjoying the blossoms of all kinds of flowers. People with high minds and qualities also do not get bored with lifting up their hearts and delighting in the Dhamma of the fully Awakened One who showed the qualities of his great compassion when he proclaimed the Dhamma. By the way: birth, old age, sickness and death and so on, are by no means a trifling matter. But suffering in the mind and heart in its various forms, is a much greater and more important matter, for which no comparison can be found.

If there is not yet clear knowledge of the way out of suffering in the round of existence, then one will think of oneself as more or less being [the source of] happiness, and in doing so one is fooling oneself, lying directly to one's own face. It is not only that in this way one does not recognise oneself, it is also that it is a kind of knowledge by which one castrates oneself, because the days of one's life fly past and don't return. This kamma takes precedence,

this kamma determines, it fetters and constricts, it leads to a transformation into dark and dumb[6] Dhamma, tainted Dhamma. Only the *arahants** are of the kind that dwells beyond kamma and its results. All others are slaves under the thumb of kamma and its results. And that kamma and its results can, in short, be divided into two categories – worldly kamma and supramundane kamma. Worldly kamma can also be divided into many categories. There is the kamma as a human being, as an animal, as a *preta**, as a hell being, as a *deva** and as a *brahma**. One could go on for a long time before ever coming to an end because there are just so many of them.

The part of supramundane kamma that goes beyond the world comes in seven kinds, starting with the path to *stream entry** and ending with the path to arahantship (the fruit of arahantship is no longer included), as long as one is still subject to kamma and its results. One who believes in kamma and its results and has become familiar with this is said to have attained an inner treasure chest, namely the treasure of *saddhā**, if one believes in what one should believe in, that is, that good deeds bring good results and bad deeds bring bad results. Then one knows how to make a choice between things to do and things not to do because one has already attained the eye of wisdom, the eye of Dhamma. This inner treasure chest opens the door to receiving other treasures within.

Saddhā, confidence balanced with wisdom, thus becomes a noble confidence, the starting point of a holy life based in the Buddha's teaching. It is a confidence based in wisdom that prepares the next step by balancing confidence and wisdom in order to escape the troubles of greed, hatred and inner delusion that have been brewing one's bad character for a long, long time. Confidence and wisdom at this level are a weapon that is sufficiently strong enough as to be able to defy middle levels of delusion. We have to take out the weapon and use it all the time. Then the days of delusion are numbered until it must finally give way.

The root cause behind the writing of this biography

The garden fence of life, the confining yardstick that likes to be applied in the world, revolves around the "I", "you", "he, she, it" and so on. I have now passed seventy years of life. I have retreated to *dhutaṅga practice** since the year 1945 and have maintained it to this very day, August 8th, 1981, the date on which I have now begun to write. In the 36 rainy seasons that have passed since then, the mass of suffering has made the urgency clear. This is the underlying cause that made me think about writing down the story of my life.

And there was also the Venerable Inthawāy Santussako *Bhikkhu*,*[7] who provided me with enough notebooks, enough for several volumes, and at the same time implored me to write everything down. Two or three years have now passed since he gave me these notebooks. And then there is Khuṇ Woen, who has been living with me for several years. He told me: "Whenever *Than** *Ācān** Inthawāy comes to visit, he always asks me whether the Venerable Master has begun writing or not. I then reply that he is not yet ready to take up the task." The good reasons for writing have pushed the writer into a corner. And on top of that, the aforementioned Khuṇ Inthawāy was ordained under this guy here, and took on a lot of suffering and hardship in the early stages of Phū Cõ Kõ,[8] nine years in a row, as did his parents and relatives. Furthermore, he has long been practising with, and intimately connected to, the monks and novices of this practice tradition.

If I were not to say something about [this tradition] – from the time of Huay Sāi, Luang Pū Sao and Luang Pū Mun up to the present time in Phū Cõ Kõ – then it would be as if I wanted to hide [the causes of] gain and loss in my own life story. As if I was only lifting up my own tail like a defecating cow or buffalo.

But first I had to be ready to drop my objections in order to start writing. If one hoped to carry the burden of objection all the way to *Nibbāna**, one would break one's back, perish and get stuck in the world. It would be impossible.

Writing down one's own life story, along with that of the tribe, the clan and the family lineage, as it has unfolded in *saṁsāra**, in this present life alone, as far as I have a clue, shouldn't be too far beyond my abilities, even if expanded to include the urgency embedded in the Dhamma, the lessons that life has taught in each existence. The Supreme Teacher could remember past lives across millions of incalculable periods of time.[9] The arahants among his male and female followers who had knowledge of past lives could remember back for many kappas, for many eons. My memory extends only as far as I can think back, and even of that some is patchy, unsystematic and pushes my limits.

By the way, if someone else had written my biography, naturally some of it would be right, and some of it wrong, but the wrong would predominate because [my biographer] would not have been present for every posture of my body, my speech and my mind, and because he could not know how the intentions in my mind and its mental factors etc. were shaped in this or that episode. And because someone else is not the owner of this story, the owner of this story writes it down himself and takes responsibility, down to the last detail. All evils and merits, all virtues and shortcomings thus remain entirely with the owner of the story.

In the family (1911-42)

Nibbāna doesn't read along, doesn't write along, because it is not in the service of any formations.

Phra Lā Khemapatto 1945

In the family

Ancestry on the paternal side

Let us turn to the ancestry on the paternal side. They were rice farmers. The great-grandparents had already died. The grandfather's name was Nāmhung Svetwong and he lived in *Bān** Ngõy, Māk Khaeng district, Udõn Thānī province, or actually Maṇḍala Udõn, because at that time it was still a maṇḍala [– an administrative district without a capital]. The grandfather had probably been born long before Udõn was founded. The grandfather's elder brother was called Dhammvong, one of his younger brothers was called Ang, another younger brother was called Old Chatterer, but I don't know his real name. The grandmother was called something but I don't know what. She died when I was still small. The grandmother's ancestry is unclear and it's a pity I didn't ask my parents about it. I have to admit that I had already set a precedent of my own stupidity here.

Grandfather and grandmother had ten offspring, five boys and five girls.

The first child, Mrs. Õnsī, had three children. Aunt Õnsī lived to be 80 years old. The second child, Mrs. Khammī, had four children. The third child, Mrs. Pe, had five children.

The fourth was my father, Mr. Khūṇ, also called [Ā]Cān Khūṇ. He had eight children, five girls and three boys. The first child was Mr. Singh (Thit[10] Singh), the second was Mrs. Sītā, the third Mr. Thõng Dī (Thit Thõng Dī), also called Village Headman Thõng Dī. The fourth was Mrs. Bunmī, the fifth Mrs. Canthī, the sixth Mrs. Kaeo, the seventh Mrs. Waen and the eighth was me, the writer of these lines. So this means that I am the last-born child of my mother.

I want to make it understood that all eight children were born four years apart and all were together for some time, but at the time of this writing only two of my elder sisters are still alive, namely only sister Kaeo and sister Waen. But people simply live to different ages according to the nature of their *formations**. The life span can be compared to the twilight at dusk, as it disappears behind the mountains, behind the horizon. If mindfulness and wisdom don't dare to go beyond the state that is called childish, then one is inevitably stuck to the threefold cause[11] at death.

In fifth place among my grandfather's children comes Mr. Bun, also called Mayor Bun, who had four descendants. The sixth child was Mrs. Lun, who had seven descendants. The seventh child was Mr. Pān (Mayor Pān), who had one child. The eighth was Mr. Duang (Thit Duang) with three descendants. The ninth child was Mrs. Saeng with five descendants. And the tenth child was Mr. Lā (Village Head Lā) with four descendants.

Since I am now dealing with the lay community on my father's side – if I wanted to go into detail about his children, grandchildren as well as his great-grandchildren, I wouldn't be able to finish this so quickly. But no matter whether the family tree is small or large, no one escapes decay and death. Those who haven't yet escaped kamma are subject to the law of cause and effect. If you do good, you reap good. If you do bad, you reap bad. As long as the defilements of the heart haven't been brought to an end, we continue to circle in birth, old age, sickness and death. We are all relatives travelling on the path of the defilements – in all three worlds.

As already mentioned, this serves as a certain balancing principle when writing a biography. To take the past, future and present into Nibbāna is in principle impossible. What is more related to and dependent on the present is the path of development, which consistently connects the essence of ethics, training of the mind and wisdom, and uses them at the right time. In this way, meditation is not called into question, which would otherwise create a template for the "outer book", which would then turn into a grabbing for fish outside the net and cage. Something like this tempts one to send [the heart] outside to flounder and to not get to know the methods

of the journey on the path of mind and heart, on the path of mindfulness and wisdom.

Therefore, one should use the mind and the Dhamma, together with mindfulness and wisdom, anchored in the present, as a boat, as a raft, as a paddle to leave the shore of delusion and cross the flood. As soon as one is able to cross over, one naturally no longer clings to the "knower",[12] nor to the past, the future nor the present, because one no longer hijacks the past, the future and the present, taking them as a self and making them an object of concern. This is because all affliction has been discarded and shaken off through real, true knowledge. At the same time, any inner lack has been uprooted. The attitude of expectation, which is called craving, is extinguished within at that same moment. There is no more before or after. Just as in the same moment that the sun radiates brightness the darkness disappears.

If I were to write about ancestry and family without including a few verses and lessons of Dhamma, then it would look one-sided, a blatant mess. It would not be uplifting for the heart because it would only be about worldly matters. If a wise person were to read it, they would burst out laughing.

All writing and reading originates in the formations of body, speech and heart. Nibbāna doesn't read along, doesn't write along, because it is not in the service of any formations.

Ancestry on the maternal side

Let us return to the account of my ancestry, this time on my mother's side. She came from Phak Thong Chay district, Nakhõn Rāchasīmā province, and they were large-scale farmers. But regardless of whether it was the father's family or the mother's family, they were all genuine Lawā-Laotians who cannot say "yīsip" but only "sāo".[13] I don't know the history of my maternal great-grandparents because I didn't ask [my mother] about them. I only know the names of my maternal grandparents. The grandfather was called Viśet, the grandmother was called Tum, but I don't know the family name. They had six descendants.

The first child was Mrs. Nū. The second child was Mrs. Kham. The third child was called Mrs. Phaeng, and she was my mother. The fourth was Mrs. Huak. The fifth was Mrs. Khā. The sixth was Mrs. Lā.[14]

By the time Miss Lā was big enough to crawl, my grandmother had also died. At that time, Aunt Nū, the eldest child, was about nineteen years old. When my grandfather was finished with the funeral duties, and had dedicated meritorious acts to my late grandmother, he reflected: "If I continue to stay here in the house by the paddy field, the land will soon become scarce. Crime is on the rise at the moment and will continue to increase in the future. North of here I know of a new settlement, Bān Māk Khaeng, where there is a lot of wide, open, uncultivated land. I am selling my fields, paddy fields, plantations, house and stables and moving there with my children. I think this will help us avoid a crisis in the future."

When the grandfather had made up his mind, he sold his property at a bargain price and took all his six daughters with him on their journey. He lugged what could be lugged, and travelled on foot. The household fell apart not long after the grandmother had died.

Impermanence follows, leads to and causes separation, grief, sorrow and worry. There is just this whole mass of suffering in all three worlds. The writer of these lines is the grandson of this man. A feeling of being moved arises and grows stronger in light of the virtues of my parents and grandparents on both sides. They are infinite in number, infinite in greatness, these human qualities, and it is not wrong to place them alongside the qualities of the arahants. Even the Blessed One, the Supreme Teacher, the Great Sage, proclaimed this. I am determined to believe him. At the same time, I raise the white flag. Never will I speak disparagingly of them. They are unshakeable, like the high mountains, in my heart until I reach Nibbāna, hopefully soon, in this life.

Let's now go back to the story of my mother and grandfather, as he led his family on foot on their way north to a new homeland. Aunt Nū, the eldest, lugged what she could. Aunt Kham carried her youngest sister Lā, who could only just crawl, in her arms, taking

turns with my mother, Miss Phaeng, who was only about twelve years old at the time. They travelled for fifteen days and nights until they reached the Udõn soil, the place then referred to as the new Māk Khaeng settlement (note: the name "Udõn Thānī province" didn't exist at that time). The new settlement was a good ten kilometres north of the present-day town of Udõn.

So they built a house and lived there. Later, the settlement was named Bān Kud Sra in the district of the provincial capital Udõn Thānī, and it is still known by that name today. The grandfather acquired several hundred rai[15] of land and kept more than a hundred head of livestock, cattle and buffalo. *Wat** Bua Bān, which still exists today, was also located on grandfather's land. He had an intimate relationship with the village temple and was absorbed in providing the temple with the four requisites.[16] The family houses were mostly grouped around the temple, on its south and west sides.

As Bān Kud Sra developed, because one by one [new citizens] were arriving from Khorāt,[17] mainly from Phak Thong Chay district but also from elsewhere, the village was elevated to the status of a municipality, and had about 200 households. The abbot was promoted to *upajjhāya** at that time and he became famous, admired and respected by the people. He belonged to the Mahānikāya order, where they liked to study the ancient Mūla and give formal lectures based on palm leaf manuscripts.[18]

Let us follow this subject further. All six of my grandfather's daughters married in turn when each of them was of the appropriate age and started a family, all in Bān Kud Sra.

If I, as the author of this biography, were to think of my family line on my mother's side and on my father's side, and to add up all the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of all the family members, both those who have already died and those who are still left, it would come to several hundred. But no matter whether human, deva, *māra** or brahma, everything that is body and mind, arises, then changes, then ceases. This is true in the whole of the *threefold world spheres**. And although it is like this, people push and shove, jostle and hustle each other. In addition to this, there is this whole mass of suffering in the realm of the inner defilements.

Yet at the time of Rāma VI[19] in Thailand, the strength of the country numbered only about 14 million, and a few thousand here and there. But today, as I write this down, it is 40 million or so.

In every epoch, all formations, whether animate or not, arise, change, and then cease. Apart from formations, there is nothing else that arises. Apart from formations, there is nothing else that changes. Apart from formations, there is nothing else that ceases. Apart from formations, there is nothing else that is suffering. Apart from suffering, there is nothing else that arises. Apart from suffering, there is nothing else that exists, changes and then ceases. Apart from *aniccaṁ**, there is nothing else that arises, changes and then ceases. Apart from aniccaṁ, there is nothing else that is aniccaṁ and nothing else that is *dukkhaṁ**. Apart from suffering, there is nothing else that exists. Apart from suffering, there is nothing else that changes. Apart from suffering, there is nothing else that ceases. It is simply suffering that arises. It is simply suffering that changes. It is simply suffering that ceases.

Whether suffering or aniccaṁ, the meaning is the same. If one is occupied with aniccaṁ, one is bound to also seek out suffering. If one is occupied with dukkhaṁ, one seeks out aniccaṁ. They have one and the same meaning, both forwards and backwards. If one thinks that they have different meanings, then it can be said that one had lost one's way in the formulations, and that one's wisdom is not yet sharp enough. One hasn't yet gone beyond doubt with regard to aniccaṁ and dukkhaṁ.

Concerning *anattā**, it is a particularly deep aspect of Dhamma in the Buddha's teaching. If genuine wisdom and knowledge are lacking, then one might claim, with an enthusiasm that surpasses everything, that it is so empty that it transcends all fields and boundaries. When meditation experts don't have enough clear knowledge about anattā, so that they don't hold on to either attā or anattā, they clash in heated discussions and disputes on this subject of anattā until their heads turn black and red, to the point that it degenerates into a war. A war of defilements over anattā, such a war itself being predominantly a matter of attā.

Anattā is not the fire of the defilements, nor the fire of suffering, nor any other evil, true in the sense of convention. It is only true in the highest sense because it is the deepest teaching about the deepest truth. There, arising and passing away, as well as non-arising and non-passing away come together. If we want to compare it with food: fish bones, meat and other kinds of bones all come together in the same bowl, plate or pot. The scholarly experts don't look for clear evidence in the meditation practice, kammaṭṭhāna, in terms of present states of mind, present things. What one has set up for oneself is naturally cooked in one's own delusion, pickled in the essence of the *khandhas**, and it besieges the city of the heart.

The desired inheritance

Let's turn the formations of the heart[20] back to the biography. I was born on the nineteenth, Year of the Pig, month of February, third day in the half-month of the waxing moon, on a Monday morning, in the year 1911. My mother had told me this clearly and unmistakably. It was in my mother's nature, in her character, that she was able to remember everything so well. Of all eight children born from her womb, she could remember the day and year of birth according to the lunar calendar. There was no guesswork and no embarrassment. The only curious thing was that she didn't know the day [according to the Gregorian calendar], probably because she didn't know any books.[21]

Now to my birthplace: Bān Kud Sra, village no. 2, Kud Sra municipality, Māk Khaeng district, Udõn Thānī province, Maṇḍala Udõn (at that time it was still a maṇḍala). (But this doesn't match the details on my monk's identity document, which was issued at the time of my ordination – the location details correspond to the status as at the time of ordination). Then there was school: completed two years of compulsory education, and that was it. Occupation: rice cultivation and animal husbandry. Father: Mr. Khūṇ Svetwong. Mother's name: Phaeng. I already mentioned the address above because I am somewhat unsystematic and haphazard in my writing. When I think of something I write it down immediately. [This text] probably won't be submitted for examination at the

Sanām Luang[22] and I probably won't be graded for it. And that's likely not a bad thing.

When I was six years old, I asked my father, "Papa, does our household have any merit or not?" Papa replied, "It has merit." I asked further, "It's a yellow lump, isn't it, Papa?" Papa replied, "Mmh, it is a yellow lump. That's right, child." Now, the father had satisfied the child's curiosity and then he smiled.

Once, when it was time to go to the paddy fields, all my elder sisters were busy "sticking" rice[23] while I played near the paddy fields that had been ploughed and levelled. The father explained and pointed with his hand at the same time, "I will give these paddy fields to this child and to that child. Little Mr. Lā will get that row over there." I replied to the father and the sisters, "But I won't take them!" One of the sisters asked, "If you don't take them, where else are you going to take something?" I replied, "There, in the temple. There is my paddy field." And I pointed to the temple, that was very close to the paddy fields. When my father heard this, he smiled.

In the dry season, he often took me to the temple to play because our house was nearby. The young bhikkhus and *sāmaṇeras** liked to talk. And I liked to ask questions. When I listened to them as they practised the texts or gave discourses based on palm-leaf manuscripts in the *Īsān** dialect, it would go to my heart. The content of the discourses was: "Me … mayā." The attendant was called Ānanda. "Sutaṁ sutvā …" This meant that he had heard this teaching directly and truly from our Buddha. That was exactly what was so outstandingly good. So it is. For example.

Childhood experiences that left an impression

In 1922, after only two years of primary school, I was already finished with school. When I was twelve years old, a *thudong** monk came and stayed on a hill where the rice fields began. My father built a simple shack for him to stay in, but he only stayed there for a week. Since his ordination, he had seven *rains retreats** behind him. His name was Ācān Khamphā from Bān Phohn Lau, Phehn district, Udŏn Thānī province. His father was friends with my

father, and he himself was a friend of my elder brother, Thit Thõng Dī. And so, we had a mutual respect and confidence in each other, from my father's time until today.

At that time, when the thudong monk was staying there, and I had already finished my school education, my father told me to boil water and offer it to him.[24] I would also go there before nine o'clock in the morning and be ready to serve him or offer him things. The twelve-year-old felt he could observe [certain things] about this monk that no one else had pointed out to him, when he saw his impeccable behaviour. Among them was the habit of eating everything from the alms bowl, both sweet and savoury, and leaving rice and other dishes in the bowl [after the alms round]. When he had eaten enough, only two or three mouthfuls were left in the bowl.[25] Also, he did not eat slowly or for long. He would quickly wash his hands and rinse his mouth. Then he washed and dried the bowl calmly, deftly, neatly and nimbly. There was no clattering or rattling at all. And my inspiration and respect for this venerable monk became so much deeper. He was of fine appearance and radiance. And these impressions and memories of this venerable monk have not faded to this day. I suspect that I never really ran away from that salty taste, that is, from the salt.[26]

My father, of course, stayed with the venerable monk every night to learn Dhamma. He told my father that he didn't look around while walking thudong; he walked with his gaze sufficiently lowered. And all the while, he was meditating *Buddho* as he walked. He didn't even know when he had crossed the Mae Khong.[27] He once turned around and realized that the Mae Khong was behind him and that he had already crossed it. He didn't tell his secrets all over the place, but only to my father.

He spoke about the Eomõng Cave to which he had hiked. There was a rock bridge on the way, about two rope lengths long,[28] which spanned a precipice. This precipice was deep. He looked down from the bridge. He saw many dead monks and alms bowls. They had slipped on the rock bridge and fallen down. He himself had stumbled and fallen over, but not very hard; he just caught his alms bowl, which suffered a few dents. They had been five monks travel-

ing along the path. Some ended up halfway in the belly of death, some tripped on the rock bridge and fell to their deaths. He was the only one left who made it to that cave. The cave had a closed stone gate that divided it into two rooms and he was able to enter one section. At first it was dark inside. He meditated continuously on *Buddho*. Then he heard the loud groaning sound of the door opening. He didn't walk inside, but instead moved inside in a sitting posture and crossed the cave. It was dark, but it became light before his eyes, and there was a tiger with its jaws open. A real tiger, not a tiger made of stone! He made a frightening gesture.[29] He escaped from that cave chamber and reached a chamber with piles of gold and silver. On escaping from that chamber he heard voices talking, but he saw no one. A gentle, beautiful voice said, "Why don't you leave the training?[30] Take a wife!" Another beautiful, gentle voice interrupted on the spot, "If you leave the training, it is as if you are rushing away from the Dhamma that you are supposed to attain, that you are supposed to arrive at. Don't do that!"

This is what the twelve-year-old could remember, because his father had told it to him. And the venerable monk also told the story, in various different ways, of his retreat to the seclusion of the Vulture Peak,[31] because he had been there. The value of the silver coins offered to him on the way to this solitude was in the hundreds and thousands. But he hadn't collected them, he had left them wherever they came to him.

The first going forth, and the first ordination

When I had entered the eighteenth year of life, I was ordained as a samaṇera, in Wat Bua Bān in that very same Bān Kud Sra, under the upajjhāya Nū Tissathero,[32] the abbot. He had many rains retreats[33] behind him, firstly because he was even older than my parents, and also because he had been ordained at a young age. And my parents told me that they would like me to be ordained. And at the same time, my humble self had the same wish too. As did the upajjhāya. We were all of the same mind before we had even talked about it. There was no doubt or hesitation, and the upajjhāya

opened the door to me with his body and with his words – and with his heart, by giving me, as his student, close contact with him.

In the first rains retreat, I studied the Dhamma of the palm-leaf manuscripts. At the same time I also studied books of scriptural discourses and learned to recite the morning and evening *pūjā**. I learned twelve legends in the original text, and in the elaboration on their content. When it came to studying the Dhammacakkappavattana *Sutta**, Mahāsamaya Sutta, Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, Ādittapariyāya Sutta, the methods of giving *anumodanā**, reciting short discourses, or memorizing them through constant recitation, everyone in that temple at that time gave it their all. In the second year I had already finished memorizing Navakovāda[34] in the hot season, and in the rainy season I finished Dhammacakk, Mahāsamay, Anatta and Āditta.[35] In the time leading up to the third rains retreat, I studied for the Nak Thamm Trī, the class three Dhamma expert exam. I took the exam at the Sanām Luang in Wat Bodhisomphõn in Udõn Thānī, and received a grade of 12 R., which meant that I had scored an A. After the third rains retreat in the month of November, I left the training as a sāmaṇera.

In April, I was in the selection process for compulsory military service. My mother was worried that I might be caught up in being drafted as a soldier. The selection process turned out well, but I still didn't draw the right lot.[36] By this I mean that I hadn't been a novice for six months and was therefore subject to the army's selection process.

Still in the month of May of that year, I received full ordination as a bhikkhu in the same wat from the same upajjhāya as before. In those days, if someone had disrobed, even for a day or two, then after being re-ordained he had to re-learn the previous level of Dhamma expert. Even if he had already taken an examination in it, he had to take an examination again. I too took the exam again and scored a "B", this time with a grade of 11 R. — "R." meaning "right". So I had been examined twice at the Sanām Luang in order to become a class three Dhamma expert and had received two certificates. Not long after the Dhamma expert examination I left the training again and departed from monastic life.

In the quagmire of suffering as a householder

I hadn't particularly wanted to leave monastic life, but my circle of friends tempted me to get carried away, and, following their wishes I disrobed. Six months after disrobing, I got married. We were together for a year before we broke up. We had a child, a girl. A year after that, I got married again, in a suburb of Udõn city, namely Bān Duea, Nõng Bua municipality, Nõng Bua railway station. Nine years after the wedding, we had three children. The eldest was a boy, the second a girl, the third a boy, but the girl was struck by kamma when she was just three years old, in that very ninth year. My wife was ill for fifteen days, and she too was taken by kamma. After completing all the duties with the funeral, I had a year to get some breathing space, then my mother died. She was over eighty years old.

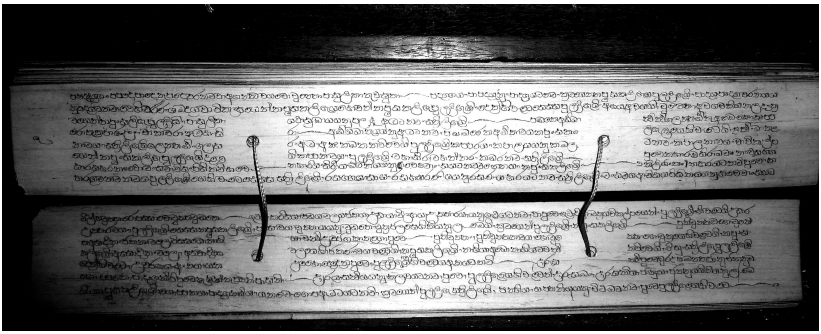
After [my wife's death], I entrusted my children to their aunt Kaehn. Her husband's name was Khamphā. They were rice farmers. Aunt Kaehn had been my wife's elder sister. She was infertile and had no children. She was given my two children, namely little Sao at the age of eight and little Lui at the age of three; and also, all the meadows, fields, paddy fields, house, farm, barn, and three buffaloes. All these things made up the inheritance that had been the property of the deceased, my wife. She had already divided up her property rights between them before her death, which meant that I had had no share in the efforts to acquire rice silos, the house and farm, the land, cattle and buffaloes. All that was left for me was the determination to grow rice for our livelihood, because the estate had belonged to my wife.

Aunt Kaehn, my wife's older sister, who was infertile, had already been awarded a share of the inheritance before her younger sister had died. She had also previously awarded each of the three younger brothers and Aunt Kaehn's older brother a share of the inheritance. Aunt Kaehn was the lucky one because she also received the two nephews along with their inheritance. And with that she also received a favour on the side, because she was infertile. She had been faced with the urgent task of having to find a foster child as a descendant [and heir].

But when it came to the issue of ordination I was also lucky. Since separating from my first wife, I had been thinking about taking ordination. Although my father had already recommended ordination to me at that time, I was a conceited guy who thought he would then make fun of me for not being able to find a wife, and that I would take refuge in ordination to shake off any thoughts of comparison with my ex-wife. When my father heard this, he laughed. Even when my second wife was not yet pregnant, my father talked behind closed doors about making sure that I could slip away and be ordained. Because my father loved ordination more than getting married, as this would alienate the son from him.

And it was in his nature not to accept that someone else should host the novice or monk ordination for his own son, as far as the requisites for ordination were concerned. He even said that all of his sons should be ordained in the genuine way. For a true monk, it is proper to wear the robe till the hour of death. My father always encouraged me in this.

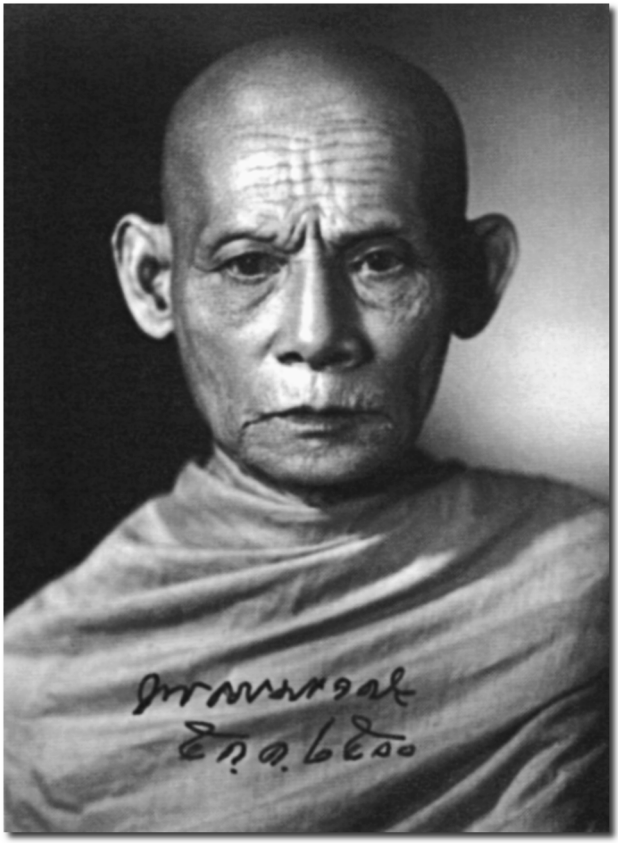
As for the representatives of the female sex among his children, my father was happy to raise them until they could start a family of their own. "Whether your mother dies before or after me, as long as there is enough firewood the body can be burnt." To have firewood means to have *dough*. My parents and relatives are people who have taken refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, just as it should be.



When I listened to them as they practised the texts or gave discourses based on palm-leaf manuscripts in the Īsān dialect, it would go to my heart.

Monk again (1943-45)

Wisdom-knowledge must be able to see according to the truth, and to let go, for there is no obligation to capture and claim things: "This is me, or someone, or a being, or a person."



Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī, on 5 July 1957

Monk again

Return to the holy life

Let us now turn to the subject of the ordination. First, I had to be ordained in the Mahānikāya.[37] My upajjhāya at the ordination was *Phra Khrū** Khūṇ from Bān Thā Tūm. He was invited to perform the ordination in Bān Yāng. In that very Bān Yāng, *Luang Phõ** Thõng Suvaṇṇasāro was the abbot. On top of that, he was a disciple of upajjhāya Nū from Bān Kud Sra as well as Phra Khrū Khūṇ. Than Ācān Sao from Bān Dong Ling was invited to take on the role of anusāvanācariya. Luang Phõ Thõng Suvaṇṇasāro was the kammavācācariya. And Phra Khrū Khūṇ was the upajjhāya.

So why didn't I get ordained in the *Dhammayutnikāya**? It was because my mother was advanced in years and in this way, I could be close to her, [my temple was] only two kilometres away. It was conveniently located so as to make it possible for me to visit her in matters of Dhamma. Besides, I had long respected the upajjhāya and the announcing ācāns,[38] as did the entire former family. When the Venerable Phra Khrū Khūṇ heard the news that I wanted to be ordained, he opened all doors for me with his body, speech and also his heart. I couldn't get around that because I feared I would otherwise offend him. And this venerable elder was generous and open-minded in every respect.

In April of that year 1943, after being ordained, I occupied myself with memorising various suttas, and by the time the rains retreat came it was all back, including *Navakovāda** and Dhammavibhāga, volumes one and two. I also continued my studies to become a class two Dhamma expert and took the examination for it in the same year. In the second rains retreat, I studied further to be a class one Dhamma expert, and took the exam at the Sanām Luang in Wat Bodhisomphõn in Udõn. At that time, both Dhammayut monks and Mahānikāya monks had to take the examination at the

same place at the Sanām Luang in Wat Bodhisomphõn. And I was ordained into the Mahānikāya at that time. I trained in the *khõ wat**, the monastic form, with increasing rigour, especially in my personal practice. And the Venerable Ācān Abbot had nothing against this. I ate *ekāsanikaṅga** just once a day, that is, one meal. I didn't munch away while eating, and ate only before midday, except to take medicines against illnesses. I stopped digging in the soil and cutting plants. As for the money that went towards my expenses, I didn't keep it myself.

My mother died that year, mindful, peaceful and without probems. (That is to say, throughout this process she kept up the meditaton on *Buddho*.)

No expectations of the formations

When the funeral duties were done, I bowed to my upajjhāyācariya to take my leave, with the request to see Than *Cao Khuṇ** Dhammacedī (Cūm Bandhulo).[39] At that time, he still bore the title Phra Debkavī. My original upajjhāya, however, didn't give me permission, and expressed in many ways that he didn't want to miss me. I therefore conveyed to him:

"I wasn't that young when I was ordained, and am now in my thirties. My child has passed away, my wife has died on me. If I stay near my old home, it isn't conducive to the practice. The world will go around saying that I have been ordained for a living. But this time as a monk, I see the danger in saṁsāra in its entirety. I no longer have any expectations of life, nor any expectations of the formations. I want to practise Dhamma to escape the suffering in saṁsāra."

The Venerable Phra Khrū Khūṇ listened and compassion arose in him. And so, in the end, he gave his consent. After bowing to him in farewell, I packed together my requisites. I asked my nephew Bunlāy Bunmātum, my sister Kaeo's son, to bring them to Wat Bodhisomphõn. *Mahā** Suphat, also a nephew of mine, was Than Cao Khuṇ's monastic secretary, who lived on the ground floor of Than Cao Khuṇ's *kuṭi**. So I went up, bowed at his feet and gave

him a letter of recommendation. This letter of recommendation had been written by Mahā[40] Chaloem, a second-degree brother-in-law, who was a teacher at the Bān Yāng school. Mahā Chaloem was a brother-in-law of Mahā Suphat. He had long ago been ordained as a monk by Than Cao Khuṇ at this very Wat Bodhisomphõn and had also been a close disciple of Than Cao Khuṇ in the time before Mahā Suphat came. Then he had disrobed in order to teach at a secular school. This was a real stroke of luck, that was opportune in every respect, even though Than Cao Khuṇ Debkavī already knew my family well enough to know that we were a family that followed right livelihood. The Venerable Phra Debkavī received me willingly and warmly.

Having received me with kindness, he let me stay on the ground floor together with Phra Mahā Suphat for about seven days. Then he sent for a lay supporter from the Nõng Nam Khem forest monastery to pick me up and take me there to practise and await re-ordination. In Wat Pā Phochay, which was located in Bān Nõng Nam Khem, Luang Phõ Bunmī was the abbot. The monastery was about twelve kilometres from Wat Bodhisomphõn, Udõn Thānī, in Chiang Yuehn municipality, in the district of the provincial capital Udõn.

This Wat Pā Phochay Nõng Nam Khem is a monastery that they built for the Great Phra Ācān Mun when he returned to Udõn from Chiang Mai to spend the hot season there at the invitation of Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī. When the rainy season came, Luang Pū Mun spent the rains retreat at Wat Pā Nohn Nives, on the northern outskirts of Udõn, which was a great blessing.[41]

I want to tell a little about Luang Phõ Bunmī from Wat Phochay in Nõng Nam Khem, in the district of the provincial capital, in regard to his practice. He too had studied under Luang Pū Mun when he was in Nõng Nam Khem. That's when things really got down to business. He knew and understood every aspect of the monastic form, khõ wat, in Luang Pū Mun's practice. And he loved and respected Luang Pū Mun without any trace of half-heartedness. Luang Phõ Bunmī practised as strictly as he could at the age of 72. In terms of ordination years, he was entering the eighteenth rains

retreat. It was his style to teach in a suitably restrained and intelligent manner, placing much emphasis on escaping the suffering of saṁsāra as quickly as possible. He also didn't initiate any fussy work projects because from a material standpoint the monastery was already provided for enough to be enough. He gave instructions to step on the gas, to tighten one's belt, to give one's all. Napping during the day wasn't allowed. The tasks in the monastery had to be done on time. And at night he only allowed about three to four hours of sleep.

Re-ordination as a Dhammayut monk

When the month of February came during the dry season that year, Than Cao Khuṇ Debkavī (Cūm Bandhulo) summoned me for re-ordination. When I had learned of the appointed time, arranged and replenished my requisites, I went on foot with a layman and two monks to Wat Bodhisomphõn in the town of Udõn Thānī. I sought out the Venerable Cao Khuṇ Debkavī in his kuṭi, bowed at his feet and greeted him with these words, "Do I have to perform the ceremony of disrobing from the Mahānikāya first, or what is the procedure?" He answered me graciously, "That's really not necessary! After all, you are one who clearly has good intentions. Go in yellow for re-ordination. My dear Mahā Suphat, fetch me the razor. I want to shave his head as a ceremonial act. The hair is not actually long enough to shave yet, but never mind. I will set about shaving him. It's good luck."

If I contemplate this according to the *vinaya**, the Venerable Cao Khuṇ has conducted himself in an utterly correct manner. The Vinaya says: when the upajjhāya shaves his *saddhivihārika**'s head, it is absolutely appropriate because both sides will feel respect for each other when they remember back to it.

When the hair was shaved off, the Venerable Cao Khuṇ had another monk ring the bell. Everyone gathered in the ordination hall and I underwent re-ordination with Phra Khrū Dhammadhara as kammavācācariya. Following this, the Venerable Cao Khuṇ issued me with a monk's identity document with the sequence number

1318, dated 15 February 1945, 1 pm and 15 minutes. I couldn't use the old monk's identity document any more because of the different monastic affiliation.

When everything was done, I bowed goodbye and returned to Wat Phochay Nõng Nam Khem as before. I arrived just in time, just before darkness fell. That was one problem that had been taken care of. I felt enormously relieved and entered *nissaya**, the mentor-disciple relationship, with Luang Phõ Bunmī the same day. Now we could concentrate fully on the practice, and no longer had to worry about other things.

At that time, the place was secluded, peaceful and quiet, but there were many vipers, as it was a large jungle of deciduous trees, including field trees, manaeng trees and enmõn trees. When the time came to enter the rains retreat, there were five monks and three novices living here together. We took on the dhutaṅga practices to the extent that was appropriate. When we had returned to the wat [after alms round], we didn't accept any food that was brought later. Sweet and salty, all in one bowl. Those who, after having eaten their fill, still had food left in their shoulder bag or bowl, even if it was only the equivalent of a hen's egg, were considered to have no sense of moderation when it came to eating. But this wasn't really seen as a problem.[42] Every individual felt joy, based on a sense of satisfaction with their own actions because there were only genuinely dedicated people here.

Meditation in the first rains retreat

In my personal meditation practice, I usually focused my attention on the in-breath and out-breath as an anchor point. In fact, I had been practising this when still a householder. It was in the period after the death of my wife that I had started. I had *nimittas**, visions of light and of cloud formations that drifted by and dissipated. I was inclined towards the contemplation of the *three characteristics**, that was already clear to me as a layman. As my mind settled into mindfulness of the breath, I no longer heard any sounds. I even muted out the sound of the mõlam rap they used to perform in the temple

when I was still a Mahānikāya monk. So I had already acquired a taste for it and had no doubts. When the power [of concentration] waned, I would pull myself out and take the contemplation in the direction of the three characteristics as an encore at the end, to bid farewell to the splendour. So that has been my practice from the beginning until today. Now, if anyone tells me something about these or those various kinds of nimittas, I can listen to it (but it doesn't sweep me off my feet) because nimittas are not Nibbāna. They arise, then they change and fall apart, that's all because they haven't escaped the forces of the three characteristics. Nimittas and *kilesas**, visions and defilements all differ in taste. Kilesas and nimittas are polar opposites, miles apart.

While I was with Luang Phõ Bunmī, I didn't have too many visions, but it did happen that my plank bed would float up in the air. Sometimes it would float up high, do tumbles, somersaults and rotate. I practised walking meditation in the air, would lie in the air and would enter into concentration in that way, that too happened. And when I was lying about in mid-air like that, I would say to myself, "Look at that! So this is *samādhi**." When the power subsided, I came out of that state and saw the breath coming and going again as before. In this *upacārasamādhi**, neighbourhood concentration, such a varied collection of capers as these is possible.

The wholesome concentration at this level is subject to the power of aniccaṁ. People with wisdom can turn to the three characteristics, quickly, swiftly and in good time. This acts as an antidote to any conceit they may have that they are special, and as a way of not lulling the heart and leaving it at that. Those who have learned nothing can easily lose their mind in the process, and also believe that they have great meditative abilities. No matter who tries to bring them to their senses, they aren't interested, because they lack the wisdom to face aniccaṁ. This is because aniccaṁ is the judge that decides justly in the case of the formations and never descends from its throne. Wisdom-knowledge must be able to see in accordance with the truth, and to let go, for there is no obligation to capture and claim things: "This is me, or someone, or a being, or a person." Like plucking a flower and worshipping *avijjā** with it, the dullness, the drunkenness: and thereby doubling it and making it

even more potent. Meditation artists are prone to getting stuck at this level. It is difficult to correct until one sees finally and clearly for oneself the advantages and disadvantages at this level. Then one can escape wrong understanding; overcome it easily.

The Venerable Cao Khuṇ issued me with a monk's identity document with the sequence number 1318, dated 15 February 1945, 1 pm and 15 minutes. I couldn't use the old monk's identity document any more because of the different monastic affiliation.

On foot to Dhātu Phanom (1945/46)

Once Nibbāna without remainder is attained, how can one still claim that the flames were blown out by the force of the wind? Nor can one claim that the flames went this way or that way. Or that everything is utterly empty, one cannot claim that either. Because flames don't imagine themselves to be anything; the one who makes assertions, on the other hand, does!

Phra Ācān Sīlā Issaro

On foot to Dhātu Phanom

On to Luang Pū Mun

When the three months of the rains retreat were over, and after the end of the robe season on the full moon in the month of November (though that year we had received a *kaṭhina**[43]), I left Luang Phõ Bunmī to go in search of Luang Pū Mun. But on my way into seclusion on foot, I didn't take any roads, except at times when there weren't any back roads in a certain village or area. Although Luang Phõ Bunmī didn't know which objections to raise – and the lay community felt the same way – it was nevertheless clear that we would miss each other, as is so often the way when saying goodbye.

There were four of us on this journey: a novice aged 15, an *anāgārika** about 50 years old, and one other monk. In the morning, after the meal, when it was time, we said goodbye to Luang Phõ and the lay people. Then we left the place and set off in a southerly direction.

I practised *Buddho* together with the steps, and commented internally that [for Buddho, the Awakened One] there is no arising and passing away. Arising and passing away only concern the mental movement when repeating the *parikamma** word internally. When we expand this meditation on the qualities of the Awakened One outwards, in all their diversity, then there is no limit to them. If we reduce this meditation down to three aspects, then we have the qualities of his purity, his wisdom and his great compassion, but this too is a vast and important topic for which there is no limit. If we reduce it further to the "one who knows", again there is no limit. If we reduce it even further to just one single quality in the present moment, then we just have this one single quality in the present moment, again a vast and important topic.

And what about Dhamma and Saṅgha? They are already harmoniously integrated into the essence [of Buddho]. It is one rope made of three strands. In the parikamma word, only letters are used as abbreviations. When it sinks into the heart in this way, there is contentment with the parikamma *Buddho* at every step.

We reached Bān Mae Non just as dusk was falling and spent the night in an old abandoned temple. It was in the Kumphawāpī district, Udõn province. The temple had trees like those of a dense forest, it was located far away from the village, and was peaceful, calm and quiet. There was a dilapidated ordination hall, scattered debris of a thousand years. They said that ghosts were haunting the place. We spent a night there, but saw neither any ghost nor any ghoul. It was probably just the ghost of greed, the ghost of hatred and the ghost of delusion pervading one's being, from which one has not yet escaped.

In the morning, when we had finished the alms round and meal, we went on from that village in an easterly direction. We crossed the railway line, followed the shore of Lake Hān, passed Bān Kud Sra, Bān Phuek, Mueang Pang. All around those villages there was nothing but the expanse of rice fields. At dusk we reached Bān Pohn Thõng.

On our way, we had practised *Buddho* again, just as before. If it wasn't necessary, then we didn't talk to each other. We spent one night there. After the meal we continued on our journey. The expression "after the meal" is a short way of putting it. The alms round was a daily duty, as was eating from the alms bowl, sweet and savoury together, and limiting ourselves to one meal. No compromises or exceptions could be made. This even extended to cigarettes – since the beginning of the rains retreat, I had already resolved not to smoke any more. Limiting myself to a few requisites that could be slung over one shoulder while on the move, the whole time, from meal time until dusk.

I didn't drink water unless it was really necessary. Even if I was a little thirsty, I held back because I was afraid of getting cracked feet. You could say that by doing so, I had prepared the ground for the chronic constipation that has remained with me to this day.

That day, we went to the centre of Nõng Hãn district, staying one night in a *sālā**. After the alms round and the meal, we continued to the north-east of the district. There was nothing but quiet, peaceful hills as far as the eye and ear would reach. We didn't see a soul the whole day. We reached Bãn Kham Tã Nã at dusk and stayed overnight in an abandoned temple. In the morning, after the meal, we continued on our journey. We passed Bãn Tãd and reached Bãn Pho. On that day, as we were walking, in broad daylight, around midday, I stubbed the second toe of my right foot on a tiny stake that was in the middle of the path. The toenail had come off completely, but was still dangling from a small scrap of skin. I plucked up the courage and tore it off completely. Blood flowed in streams of red, so I grabbed a handful of sand to stop the bleeding. To dress it, I tore off a strip from my foot-wiping cloth that had been knotted around my bowl stand. Then we went on. The heart, feeling deeply moved, was engaged intensely with the topic of birth and existence in saṁsāra.

In this Bãn Pho, water for drinking and bathing was really scarce. That's probably why we all got a skin rash. And as for the toenail that had been torn off, it hasn't grown back to this day. It has become a memorial, urging this fellow here to contemplate that which has passed by as one of the many aspects of suffering to be found in saṁsāra. And if it was so, that alone was reason enough to suspend all doubt about past lives, about how such past lives can be. The same is true of future birth because present existence suffices as first-class proof of it – and where else should one look for proof? One must be ready to surrender and raise the white flag: birth is nothing but suffering. So are ageing, illness, death and so on. Because in the end there is nothing but suffering, and it has its own truth, its own flavour. It is sending us a telegram so that we can become clear about this.

Whether the heart is grieved on account of this or not depends on the practitioner's level of mindfulness and wisdom. If these are not in harmony, then they can also be lost. But when we have completely escaped delusion, they are in tune with the taste of freedom.

Only supernatural powers, glamour, gain, fame and speculation – which we bring out and apply to others or to the community, or to devas, māras, brahmas – stand in opposition to this. That is why Nibbāna has no castles in the air and no physical and mental factors dwelling there. And there is no place, no sequence of sitting, lying, standing, walking. If there is any sequence at all, then it refers only to the not-yet-extinguished result of the khandhas, khandhavipāka, which is called sa-upadisesa-nibbāna. Once anupadisesa-nibbāna, Nibbāna without remainder, is attained, how can one still claim that the flames were blown out by the force of the wind? Nor can one say that the flames went here or there. Or that everything is completely empty; you can't claim that either. Because flames don't imagine themselves as being anything; the one who makes claims, on the other hand, does! That's pretty deep Dhamma. A worldling has a hard time seeing through it and grasping it.

After spending the night in Bān Pho in an abandoned temple, after alms rounds and a morning meal, we continued on our way. Along the entire route, there were only dwelling mounds, hills in the rice fields. At dusk we reached Dung, these days Bān Dung district. We stayed one night, got up early, alms round, meal and continued via Bān Kam Maed to Bān Wang Thõng at dusk. Overnight stay in an abandoned temple. In the forest around this village, wild animals abounded, for example tigers and snakes, because the village was surrounded by dense jungle. This Bān Wang Thõng was at the end of the Nõng Hān district, which bordered Sawāng Daen Din district to the north-east. And in this Bān Wang Thõng they requested us and invited us to stay a while longer because there were secluded places to stay that were suitable in all respects. And the villagers told us that there were many tigers jumping around. On the nights of the waxing moon it would happen again and again that they would jump over fences at nightfall and enter the cattle and buffalo stables. They would kill cattle and buffaloes in the stables in the immediate vicinity of the houses in the village, and then jump out and run away.

So, we conferred with each other, "We've been on the road nonstop, until evening, each and every time since leaving the rains retreat location. It's been quite a few days now. Even though meditat-

ing while walking brings up a lot of joy, the body isn't getting enough rest. We need to take a break from all the exertion. Whether they are telling tales of tigers abounding, it doesn't matter. Sometimes they just want to test us to see if we are too afraid or not. That is entirely possible. And they have offered to build a plank bed for each of us wherever the forest is far enough away from the village. If we don't take a break here for their sake, the line of practice will be lost to them."

After we had discussed it and had approved of the idea, they came after dawn the following day and built us plank beds in a part of the jungle that was close to a running stream. There were huge rubber trees that provided dense shade. The whole village joined in and they were finished the same day. Fifty centimetres above the ground, width and length sufficient for the *klods** and for stretching the legs when lying down. They used round logs laid end to end, interwoven with each other in a crab pattern in place of *fāk**. Walls and roof were not necessary. We used our klods and mosquito nets and the leafy canopy of the trees. It was the cold season, and in the morning the klods were wet. The mosquito nets too. We stayed and practised there for about 20 days, and that was enough. There was no danger from tigers, real or paper, no bears, and all that we saw was that they had been pulling our legs.[44] We only met a few vipers. Just once I saw a porcupine in the middle of the night, passing close to my klod. And then it ran away, with a rustling sound because its spines were rubbing against each other.

My heart was set on continuing the search for Dhamma. And so, one day we conferred with each other, "We've been here for over 20 days now, enough to have made up for the fact that they built the plank beds for us. And it's time to look ahead. This time, when we move on, we should split into two groups, it's better this way. Because if four of us turn up at Luang Pū Mun's monastery all at once, it won't be in accordance with his wishes. After all, I hope to stay there and not just listen to a Dhamma talk and then move on, or turn back."

After the discussion, we were all of one mind and there were no objections. The Anāgārika decided to take one route together with

the other monk: they wanted to go to Bān Dong Yen to visit Phra Ācān Brohm[45] in Sawāng Daen Din district, Sakon Nakhõn province. Novice Bupphā was to go with me because he had pledged before we left Udõn to return to Wat Bodhisomphõn to study for the Dhamma expert exam if he reached Dhātu Phanom.[46] After the decision was made, we got up early and said goodbye to the lay supporters after the meal. They accompanied us for a bit so that we wouldn't get lost, and asked us to come back one day.

We passed Bān Bõ Mueang Phrai, followed the edge of a forest and reached Wat Pā Bān Khohk Khõn at dusk. I went to the abbot to bow. We chatted, he asked if I needed anything, then the lodgings were prepared.

A lifelong offer

The next day, after alms round and meal, we bowed in farewell and continued through the jungle of Bān Khohk Khõn. We rested for a while at the monastery in Bān Dong Bang, then left and moved on. Moving on meant meditating while walking. While walking, we didn't talk to each other, except when it was really necessary. Sometimes we followed a footpath, sometimes a cart track. We reached Bān Thõn in the evening, spent the night in an abandoned monastery, moved on in the morning after alms round and meal, crossed the Bān Thõn Forest, arrived in Bān Nõng Hāng in the evening. Overnight stay, out early, alms round, meal, passed Bān Tān Diao, on through the forest, about two hours, then we reached Wānõnnivās district. It was around noon and we rested for a while until the tiredness disappeared. We continued, and late in the afternoon, around four o'clock, we arrived in Bān Kud Ruea.

A layman who spotted us quickly came to meet us, took the bowls and klods from us and took us to our lodgings in the forest monastery near his village. There were no monks in that wat because they had all gone together into seclusion along different paths. Then he offered to boil water for us and do our laundry. He cooked and washed by himself. He said he had done it before, and could really do it on his own without needing any guidance.[47] He

also knew about *pavāraṇā**, the life-long invitation to request the four requisites.[48] He invited me, in whatever region I should find myself in the future, as long as both sides were still alive, to ask by letter [for required necessities]. As long as these things were not beyond his means, I should let him know and ask him for them.[49]

So, I gave him this as an answer, "You and your people are truly wholehearted followers of the Buddha. I would like to give my blessing to you for that. May you flourish in happiness until the end of all suffering. At the moment my requisites are all complete, but I do need about four metres of sewing thread. Sometimes fabric tears during the night, then I can use it to darn or mend the holes. Otherwise, I ask for salt and chilli. Please crush them in a mortar and mix them thoroughly. When you have ground the salt and chilli together, I ask for four or five tablespoons full. Find a piece of bamboo cane so that I can put the mixture in it as medicine. On a long journey, you can take it together with Makhām Põm and Samõ[50] as a laxative. Because since Udõn I've been on the move all day and I'm constipated. I haven't had a bowel movement for six or seven days, my dear lay supporter."

He listened, making an expression that showed that he was deeply moved, and replied, "That's really just a small thing, no problem for the giver. It can be more than just that." My reply, "If I take more, I only have more weight to carry. That's not so nice for someone who is on foot with these kinds of distances! We are walking cross-country through forests, thickets and groves. These four or five spoonfuls alone will last a long time. There's just the two of us."

We decided to stay three nights in that forest monastery. The village gave the impression that the people there were already living the Dhamma. They were very interested in the path of Dhamma practice. The old, the elderly, the young generation and those middle-aged were healthy in their appearance and their faces had an expression of intelligence. They displayed polite, courteous behaviour. They all observed the ethical precepts and practised meditation under the rows of teng and rang trees[51] in the monastery, on the seventh, eighth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of each half-

month. Whether monks were in the monastery or not, they practised all together in this way. They were quiet people, there was no commotion or noise. When it was time for the alms round, they would gather at a place in the middle of the village and line up. There were about 50 people from the 50 or so households in the village. The food was wrapped[52] and placed neatly in the alms bowl. And the manner in which they offered their support was just brilliant too.

One of them said, "The fact that this most venerable monk and his novice came by our village and stayed in our forest monastery without any prior arrangement is a gift from heaven that has graciously fallen into our laps. This may well be regarded as an overflowing of merit. But we do not yet know the plans of this most venerable monk, in which direction they may extend. If he wants to stay here and practise until we draw our last breath, or for however long, then we are determined to look after him for that length of time with all our attention. Or if he wants to stay for a shorter time, then we leave that entirely to his discretion. But if, on whatever day, month or year, he wishes to leave, then let it be so according to his wish and consideration. There is no obligation to stay or to go. We ask this most venerable monk to be our guide on the path of Dhamma. Whatever is conducive to his monastic practice, that alone shall be definitive. My people and I have the duty to behave accordingly and not to push ourselves into the foreground."

Aahh! Aahh! Since my birth and up to and including today, as I write these lines down, I have travelled to almost 30 provinces, but never have I heard lay people, in a group or individually, address their words to a monk in such a way. Such a thing is hard to find in the marketplace of the world. I humbly reflected in order to inquire in an appropriate way, "Which Phra Ācān has guided and taught you in this forest monastery, then, so that you have already attained so much wisdom in the Dhamma?" He replied, "Phra Ācān Bunmī, Dh. E. first class, Bān Sāy Mūn, Yasothõn. He is currently visiting his former home. His disciples, monks and novices, have gone with him."

When I saw the lay people of this Bān Kud Ruea offering me the four requisites, right down to chilli and ginger,[53] I became increasingly considerate towards them. And so, until now, I haven't contacted them to ask for anything. I've had no contact with them at all. Who has already died, who is still alive, I have no information about that. Perhaps we have *pāramis** from previous lives in common, that is entirely possible. For in any case, the formations are uncertain.

A teaching from Phra Ācān Sīlā

After a stay of three days, we said goodbye. Two men accompanied us a few hundred metres, far enough so that we wouldn't take the wrong path. Then I sent them back because otherwise it wouldn't have been conducive to meditation while we walked. We crossed large, high hills until we reached Bān Wā. It was around three in the afternoon. We went to Phra Ācān Sīlā's forest monastery[54] to spend the night. About ten monks and ten novices were living there. We put down our requisites in an appropriate place and bowed in greeting to the Venerable Sīlā. He had a friendly conversation with us. Then I asked him if I could show him my monk's identity document, which I had dug out of my alms bowl,[55] where I had kept it.

He said, "Never mind, my dear, that really isn't necessary.[56] I just took a look at you for a moment and already knew. See, your sandals are in a bad way. Come on, throw them away." I indicated, "It's not yet time to throw them away, because I'm still on the move. Sometimes they make a rattling noise when I walk, and then I carry them in my hand, not wearing them at all. If the path is quite overgrown or stony, then I put them on."

He said the same thing two or three more times in succession. He probably really meant it, and not just as a hint or empty remark, but I wasn't ready to accept it.[57] Then he asked, "What is your destination?" I replied, "I want to go to Dhātu Phanom and hand the novice over to a travelling group from Udõn when they come to Dhātu Phanom to pay homage, before they make their way back to

Udõn. After that, I want to go alone to Phraves Cave for a decent amount of time. Then I want to gradually turn off towards the Phū Phān Mountains and the Great Ācān Mun. I will devote myself to him body and soul, life and death, even if the Venerable Ācān scolds me, or berates me, or criticises me, or beats me."[58]

He asked, "Why are you making such a long detour on the way to Dhātu Phanom? If you come from Udõn, the direct route is via Nõng Hān district, then along the main road via the districts of Sawāng, Phaṇṇā, Sakon town, Nā Kae, Dhātu Phanom."

Answer: "Because I have decided to live in seclusion, and because I am not in a hurry. Besides, I want to get to know the solitude of the forest around each and every village. I am gathering impressions that I can later refer to: What happened in the past? Which villages, people, places are conducive to practice?"

He said, "Well, that's worth hearing. But that Phraves Cave there, my dear, that is the cave of our own body, which is encased in skin. You should practise in that cave until you gain certainty. Then you will find that Phra Ācān Mun dwells in that cave, a reliable Ācān."[59]

The Venerable Phra Ācān Sīlā's character and potential, with his calm, gentle speech, spoke directly to my mind and to my heart. I replied, "I don't mean to sound presumptuous on this subject. But I have been reflecting on it again and again. Now, as Phra Ācān Mun is still alive in this Thailand, and meditators, Kammaṭṭhāna practitioners who belong to the Dhammayut still have the opportunity to experience him now, but are not willing to go to him, practise with him and learn, even though they have not seen the Venerable Phra Ācān Mun even once, then it is as if they are devoid of any potential in this matter. As for those who will later go off to practise when he has already passed away – it would be a futile endeavour if they wanted to devote themselves to him then. Even Phra Ācān, who is giving me a talk this very moment, has already learnt from the Venerable Phra Ācān Mun and no longer has to worry in this regard. With all due respect, that is just my view." He smiled and had no objections.

Got up early, went for alms, finished eating, packed things, handed the lodgings over, then we bowed to the Venerable Sīlā. He sent a novice with us to show us the way because we were going through vast cattle pastures. He accompanied us for about a kilometre because several paths intersected along this stretch. When there was no more danger of straying off, he returned to the monastery. And we followed our noses again, just as before.

While walking, we made it a point to meditate with *Buddho*, uninterrupted, along with the steps, because a wise interpretation of the meaning of *Buddho* is that Dhamma and Saṅgha are already contained within it. *Buddho* is simply an abbreviation, to be likened to a rope made of three strands. And it is *anantamahā-anantaguṇa*, of infinitely large infinite quality, which doesn't arise and doesn't pass away. Moreover, it cannot be gauged, there is no yardstick for it. What arises and passes away are only the mind-factors of one who lets the parikamma word get lost again and again, not practises continuously. The great, infinite quality of *Buddho* hasn't arisen and hasn't disappeared somewhere at all! Even if it is reduced to the present quality, it doesn't matter, it is a present quality that is great and significant, so that no comparison can be found for it. Or if we reduce it to the qualities of purity, wisdom and great compassion, then there is again no way to fathom it. Or if we reduce it to the one who knows in the present, then it is again immeasurable. If we reduce it to a single quality in the present moment, then it is a single quality that is great and important and immeasurable.

At this point, one can also move on from the quality of the Buddha to the quality of Nibbāna. This is not wrong, because it is a great, infinite quality that doesn't arise and doesn't disappear anywhere. A far-sighted person can see into the distance. A short-sighted person can only see what is nearby. One who has a long rope can pull on it from a distance. One who has a short rope can only pull on it from close by. Regardless of whether it is the power of body, mind or wisdom, it is not tied to any particular level, and no one can claim it for themselves, or purchase it for a fixed price, or hold it in their arms – with one exception: the mindful one, the wise one. They have the freedom to know all of this and to practise

well on the supramundane path, and so they are praised by the *noble ones**.

For all the treasures of the world don't equal the treasures and the ethics of the supramundane path. But a person of high mind and high Dhamma will welcome it and be inspired by it. A person of low mind and low Dhamma will be bound, constricted and dragged along by low kamma and its consequences. This is simply an inescapable consequence.

Dangerous jungle calls for meditation

I want to tell some more about the journey. We left Wat Pā Bān Wā, reached Wat Pā Śrī Woen Chay and stayed there for two nights. You could also say we were already in Sām Phong.[60] After the meal, we continued to Bān Dong Nõi where we stayed in the forest monastery there. The people there were busy with a house blessing, presided over by Phra Ācān Bunmā from Sām Phong. Also present at the ceremony was Mahā Āb, seventh degree,[61] who had come from Bangkok to visit his old home. After I had put my bowl and requisites down in the sālā I took the novice to bow to Phra Ācān Bunmā. He inquired at length and in a friendly manner about our news and needs. At the same time, he opened all doors for us in every respect with his body, speech and mind.

The Venerable Bunmā said, "It's a long distance from here to the next village. The sole route goes through a forest populated by wild animals. Seven people went there together in broad daylight to cut grass. They were close together all the time, you know. A tiger came and took them for prey, just like that. He pounced on them and killed four people in one fell swoop. Then he dragged one away in his jaws quite unfazed. He had no fear at all. They were powerless against him. I have brought this fresh deer's head back from Bān Kham Nok Kok. Just today, the tiger ate the animal. I brought the head to take off its antlers.

Other than that, there is also a large herd of wild buffalo, estimated at over a hundred head. They are feral buffaloes that no one has been able to bring into a pen for several years. They are really

wild. They even go after their owners, kicking and trampling. If you encounter them and there are trees nearby, you can take shelter in them. But if the trees are too far away, or if there are only trees that are too thick to grab onto and that don't have branches to pull yourself up on, or if you're not fast enough, then you're on the death list because there are just so many animals bearing down on you from the front and from behind, you know, Than!

I'm not kidding you; I'm not trying to intimidate you. That's the truth, you know. I am of the opinion that you and the novice should stay here for three nights. Don't be in a hurry! I'll see to it that laymen accompany you. Then you can also help me with the evening recitation in the village, as there are only a few monks left. But if you are in a real hurry, you'll get lost, because it is all through the jungle. Both forwards and backwards, the path is confusing and chaotic. I'm afraid it would be very dangerous."

So it was decided that we would stay with him for three nights. In actual fact, there was only one monk in Wat Pā Bān Dong Nõi, Luang Phõ Rõd.[62] In addition, they had invited Phra Ācān Bunmā to the forest monastery in their village simply to make merit. When the three days were over, I bowed to him and to Luang Phõ Rõd. Venerable Bunmā wanted to send a layman to accompany us on the way to Bān Kham Nok Kok, so I asked, "How far is it from here?"

"Well, you will arrive at Dhātu Phanom towards evening because I will arrange for you to take a boat downstream." I lowered my head, raised my hands [in añjali] and politely indicated, "I have come here for no particular reason and have also inconvenienced Phra Ācān to the point that I must feel ashamed before the devas. And when I set out from Udõn in the beginning, I made a resolution to walk and not board any vehicle or boat. If I go back on that decision, there will be no safety for me in the future, I fear. Whatever the case, I have surrendered my life to Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, I commit and dedicate myself to them completely. I offer every drop of blood to the worship of Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, in every moment. And these are by no means words spoken in haste."

He spoke quietly to the monks and lay people, "Good, the mind already has access to Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. He is courageous

in matters of life and death. From the age of thirty, I think one has enough courage, but it depends on the individual." He then said in a louder voice, "If you don't get on the boat, there is another way, which is straight east, but it is very dangerous because the villages are far apart. It goes solely through forest and jungle. The path is as narrow as a mouse trail. From meal time till evening, you will not meet a soul." Then he said several times, "Do well, okay? Don't deviate from the meditation, okay?"

I confirmed what he had said by raising my hands [in añjali] to my forehead, the novice also. When everything was done, two laymen about thirty years of age accompanied us. After about half a kilometre they stopped to take a break. I asked them. I told them to turn back. They expressed that they didn't want to turn back because they would worry if they did. So I talked to the lay people, "My dear lay supporters, for those in this world for whom the kamma of dying has really arrived, there is no court of appeal in the world. So please advise me, where does the route go off to the left and where does it go off to the right?" In reply they said, "Please follow this path at all times, regardless of whether it is an old path or a new path, and by no means deviate from it." – "Well, if that is so, then you are most welcome to return home. In all the merit which I and my companion acquire, you shall have a share at all times." They raised their hands [in añjali as an expression of their] "*Sādhu**!" and then turned back.

As soon as they had left, my gaze darkened and I said to the novice, "My dear Nehn,[63] a very dangerous jungle now awaits us. We have travelled step by step from Udõn to here and have been safe in every respect, but so far it has never been as forbidding as it is today. So, we will anchor ourselves all the more in the meditation while walking, all right? We are far away from our spiritual parents, the Khrū Bā Ācāns, so we have to rely on ourselves all the more, that is, on meditating with each and every step that our feet take, namely on *Buddho*. If it is not absolutely necessary, don't speak, don't ask anything. And don't think that I have anything against you. If you are afraid, you are welcome to walk in front of me." The novice replied, "I am not afraid! And if I do get scared for a change, I will face it. If I walked in front of you and devas saw me,

they would laugh at me. And it would also go against the grain of meditation." All said and done, we turned to the meditation while walking.

By about one o'clock in the afternoon, we had crossed the jungle and arrived in Bān Nā Prasāy. By nightfall, we had reached Bān Uan and Bān Siao. There had been no dangerous situations whatsoever. We spent the night in an abandoned monastery; there were no other monks. In the morning, after the alms round and meal, we said goodbye to the lay people and continued on our journey, this time along a cart track, but through the jungle. About three o'clock in the afternoon we reached Chayaburi on the banks of the Mae Khong, at the mouth of the Mae Songkhrām, which flows into the Mae Khong here. There were four very old monasteries lined up one after the other along the banks of the Mae Khong. Only two of them had monks. We spent a night in one of the abandoned monasteries. In the morning, after the alms round and meal, they got a boat to ferry us across the mouth of the Mae Songkhrām. The current carried us across to Bān Nohn Tān. We passed Bān Thā Dõk Kaeo and arrived in the district capital of Thā Uthen at about three in the afternoon. There we stopped by Wat Dhātu Uthen, stayed there for about five minutes, then said goodbye to the place. We crossed the fields of Thā Uthen district heading in a southerly direction.

Meeting with Phra Ācān Un

We decided to stay at Phra Ācān Un's forest monastery,[64] which was located on the banks of a stream, about a kilometre away from Thā Uthen, the district capital. It was said that Phra Ācān Un was extremely strict. He sent two novices to meet us well before we had reached the monastery because we were crossing fields where we could be seen from some distance away. The head monk there was not the least bit conceited and was a Phra Ācān, yes, good heavens! When we arrived, we put our robes on diagonally, with our right shoulders uncovered, took off our sandals, put our umbrella down neatly, put our requisites down in an appropriate place and went to bow down before the Venerable Un. He was refreshingly friendly

and asked about our news, about happiness and sorrow in all aspects, and in an affable way even went so far as to open up a particular possibility for me.

The Venerable Phra Ācān said, "People criticise me and say that I am a vegetarian. Those who don't want to live with me, should just leave it. At the moment there are only two novices with me. Whatever kind of practice suits you; I grant it to you. If you prefer to recite quietly for yourself, then do that. If you prefer to recite [Pāli] together with a translation, then do that.[65] If you prefer to practise walking and sitting meditation all day, then do that. Eating meat and fish is the business of one who does it in accordance with Dhamma, as long as it doesn't violate the Vinaya.[66] As for me, I can eat whatever comes in and whatever is available. Try to live with me for a wee while (a short time), will you? You don't have to move on right away."

I explained to him, "Phra Ācān really means well to open up this opportunity for me with such serious Dhamma. This is a very rare moment in my life. But I have already made a vow, and am determined to go to Dhātu Phanom and then move in an arc across Nā Kae district to Phraves Cave in order to practise there for a while. After that, I will move down into the Phū Phān Mountains via the Phaṇṇā district in Sakon Nakhõn province, to Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue, to be with the Great Phra Ācān Mun, no matter what it takes."

He replied, "Phra Ācān Mun's forest monastery is only 750 metres from the village. Than Lā, I have been there, it isn't a hundred percent forest monastery at all. My monastery here is a full 1000 metres away. It's a real forest monastery, you know."

After these words, the Venerable Un gave me a talk that went straight to the heart, "Suppose a bird is hit by a hunter's arrow, so that it doesn't die from it, but the arrow gets stuck. If it struggles, it can even fly. So, it flies and goes around in all directions. Humans, devas, māras, brahmas and all conscious beings who inhabit the *three spheres of existence**, who haven't yet broken free from the arrow of the defilements, are also flying around in all four directions – the directions of birth, old age, sickness, death. Such is their existence. There is the direction of greed, the direction of

hatred, the direction of delusion. They are the essence of cause, the essence of origin, the essence of kamma. The results that one has to deal with are also interconnected, whether the past, the future or the present. The circling has no first knot and no last, no initial clause and no final clause."[67]

While listening to his talk I was quite moved, because he spoke in such a kind, beautiful, very gentle voice. We stayed with him for one night. The next morning, when it was time, he took us on alms round in the town. We returned to the monastery, and after the meal took our leave from him.

The Venerable Phra Ācān Un said, "If you really want to go on now, let me confess my offences first. I am here only with novices and for a long time I haven't had the opportunity to confess any offences. Mostly only by way of substitution with *kāye* before Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha."[68] After these words, he confessed his offences. I also confessed my offences because I had respect for him. Had I not done so, I would have appeared undisciplined and given the impression that I thought I was special.[69] When we were done, we said goodbye and left.

Venerable Un sent his two novices to accompany us. He pointed out to us repeatedly that at that time Annam[70] and Laos were fighting fiercely with the French colonial powers for their independence. There were many marauders who even robbed monks. They even took away very dark cloth. Only two or three days before, there had been a robbery on the route between Thā Uthen and Nakhõn Phanom, in the middle of the forest. Those robbers were quite chic, they rode bicycles. They also had rifles around their necks. They wore French linen trousers because at that time that in itself was considered smart. The two novices accompanied us for about two kilometres to the beginning of the jungle, then they turned around and went back to the monastery.

So, I gave my novice some words of caution, "My dear Nehn, we now have obstacles to pass again because vast, silent, cool forest and jungle lie ahead. We want to refocus ourselves again with the meditation at every step, don't we, Nehn?"

But when we reached the middle of the jungle around noon, young men about thirty years of age followed us one after the other on bicycles. They each had a long-barrelled rifle around their necks and were following us quite confidently. When we saw the bicycles approaching, and they were about twenty metres away from us, I put a strategy into action by placing our luggage on the side of the road and moving about six metres away from it. As part of my plan, I said out loud, "I'm so tired. Let's spread out the [sitting] cloths and rest for a bit." When the pursuers reached us, they put down their bikes in an arrogant way, all of them at the same time. So, I tried a strategy and addressed them, "We are very tired and we are resting a little bit first." And continuing, I said to them, "And where are you going?" They replied slyly, "A ride!" They didn't have even the slightest trace of good manners or respect. Then they asked, "Do you have bees[-wax]?" I replied, "I have, as much as a thumb. It is in my alms bowl. I got it from Sām Phong. What do you need it for?" Another sly reply, "To stick it on the bicycle." I replied, "Please, take a look for yourself, help yourself. I'm tired and want to stretch my limbs a little."

So they searched through our luggage as they saw fit. They only grabbed a tiny amount of wax, as much as a grain of corn. When they had finished searching, before they departed on the same route that we had taken, they bowed politely in farewell and asked for forgiveness for having behaved in such an unpleasant way. I replied, "Never mind. May you always be happy!" Then they got on their bicycles, confidently hung their rifles around their necks and rode away.

When they were far enough away, I said to the novice, "This group of bandits on this stretch here is probably the same one as the one between Thā Uthen and Nakhõn Phanom, that Phra Ācān Un had told us about before we left today. But in this case, in our past lives, we probably didn't build up any kamma of hostility, but perhaps we once rummaged through the belongings of monks and novices in the middle of the forest. That's quite possible. In any case, we are intimately familiar with the law of kamma and its results. We cannot see the old kamma from previous existences. As for new kamma, we are striving ceaselessly to avoid everything that is

not good, until we have truly reached the end of suffering." After these words, we turned the heart again, as before, to meditation while walking. We reached Wat Pā Araññikāvās just as it was getting dark.

At that time, Phra Ācān Ngohn was the abbot there. We stayed one night. Up early, alms round, meal, then we said goodbye to the abbot and headed off. At dusk, we stopped at an abandoned temple in Bān Dong Saphang. Up early, alms round, meal, then we said goodbye to the lay people and moved on. At dusk, in Bān Saehn Phan, the tension eased. We slept one night in an abandoned monastery. Alms round at dawn, meal, then we walked to Dhātu Phanom, which we reached around midday. We stayed at Wat Pā Kõ' Kaeo. This time we stayed a little longer because I had blisters on my calf. When the blisters had healed, I handed the novice over to a group of monks who had come to pay their respects [to the relics] of Dhātu Phanom, for his journey back to Udõn. And I went on foot to Bān Nā Sohk and stayed at Phra Ācān Son's forest monastery. After three nights at Phra Ācān Son's monastery, I left to walk on to Phraves Cave. The Venerable Son said to me, "Yes, me here, I live so close to Phraves Cave, but I have never gone up there into seclusion. I am always busy guiding monks and novices, busy down to my core. Oh, what the heck! I'm going to have a look at the cave now, yes!" And he decided to go there that very day. As for me, I also went to Phraves Cave on the same day.

My heart has been completely taken by this place. There are tall, shady trees and cool, fresh air. There are rocky ridges under the wide sky that let you breathe deeply; there are enough flat places.

The last leg of the journey to Luang Pū Mun (1946)

If one doesn't recognise convention and relativity, how should one recognise liberation from them?

Phra Ācān Kū Dhammadinno

The last leg of the journey to Luang Pū Mun

Arrival at Phraves Cave

When I arrived at the cave, the heart was completely absorbed. Pīti arose, tears flowed. The heart was very mild, full of emotion and confidence in Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, so that I had no comparison for it. Then the thought came into my heart that at the time of the Buddha, all those who were attracted to the mountains must have felt in a similar way. With this thought in my heart, tears again welled up.

My confidence was based on the pīti that came from being moved. But at that moment, I didn't think I was special. I just knew that my confidence was pulling me forward, never flinching. I knew it for myself, there was no doubt about what was present at that stage – what it tasted like to be alone on a mountain, in the forest, far away from all dwellings, quiet and still. There were only the voices of the forest animals, of peacocks and forest hens, for example. The taste of the mind, the taste of the heart, the taste of the Dhamma, whatever.

If seclusion alone couldn't create a stance and a path to self-mastery, then wisdom brought forth mindfulness of the mind, speech and also the body, which by themselves united to form the forces of the Dhamma. When walking backwards and forwards, when stretching the limbs, when moving and standing still, clear awareness was there all of its own accord, without compulsion. The heart was unburdened, not heavy and sluggish, and inclined towards the path of liberation from suffering in saṁsāra.

At that time, the forest in the immediate vicinity really was completely wild and overgrown with dense undergrowth. There was an enormous variety and abundance of forest animals. I went about the various aspects of my personal practice in a frugal manner. I had only one bathing cloth left. At three o'clock in the after-

noon I swept the area around [the cave] until the monastic duty was fulfilled. Then I bathed, as the water situation was favourable. There was plenty of water flowing close to the rocky cliff. I hung up my bathing cloth to dry and practised walking meditation until dark. As soon as the bathing cloth was dry, I spread it out on the sleeping area. I had a pillowcase with me. The pillow was simply my folded *saṅghāṭi**, the outer robe. The bathing cloth was spread out and served as a bed sheet. The scooper [for bathing] was my water kettle. I need not say anything about a torch, lantern or wax candle; only the moon and the stars were at my disposal. Whether you see something or whether it is dark is a matter for the eyes. The moon and stars aren't responsible for this. I didn't even hang up the mosquito net and klod because I hit my head[71] – boing!

The heart rested within itself. No one was there to tease and goad it. And it didn't have to prove itself to anyone. It was aware of its intentions at all times, drawing them to it, just as a magnet attracts iron, or iron attracts a magnet. With mindfulness, I was with myself without interruption. Rapture, the fullness of the heart, arose. Tears flowed and took some time to stop again.

I was willing to live and die wisely with Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. This was the taste of gentleness, coolness and stillness. Very different to the willingness to live and die with anger and hatred, in a hot-headed, unreasonable way. The inner tastes are as different as heaven and earth. This is true even for gross, external tastes, such as sour, spicy, salty, sweet, bitter, as long as the taste buds haven't wasted away.

Whoever touches them with their own tongue, takes them in, whether a lot or a little, will get to know the different aspects of taste. Then, temporarily, we no longer have any personal questions, it becomes a personal experience. And then we no longer mistakenly think of other people as liars either.

But some people really are liars. Such people cling heavily to material gain. This becomes their refuge. That such a person can live for material gain without becoming a slave to the world is impossible. That such a person doesn't accumulate bad results from this is impossible. And they are far from even the initial stage of the

holy life founded in the Buddha's teaching (the empty water vessel in the first discourse to Rāhula).[72]

Phenomena in Phraves Cave

On the sixth night of my stay in Phraves Cave, I occupied myself with inhaling and exhaling in the practice of mindfulness of breathing. Around 11 pm, my anchor of mindfulness, the wind sensation while breathing in and out became more and more subtle, until the air passages in the throat, where I had anchored my mindfulness, could no longer be felt.

An explosive thunder sounded just below the place where I was camped. It was as if all the mountains of the Phū Phān range were shaking and trembling. But I wasn't frightened one bit. The heart felt quite normal, quite still. Then it withdrew and looked back: today, or on any other day, even those that have passed, there is not and has not been any discrepancy at all in relation to my khõ wat. I have already scooped water and put it out ready in the kettle. I have also swept, practised walking and sitting meditation, and held the evening pūjā. I ate from the alms bowl, sweet and savoury together in one eating vessel. I didn't sip from a spoon either, in order to serve King Taste and King Tongue. I didn't pick out curry sauce, vegetables, sweets either. Yes, at this point I felt as if I were having [an inner dialogue with myself from] two different preaching chairs:

"For what purpose have you come here?"

"To escape the suffering in saṁsāra."

"Really?"

"Really, truly!"

"Didn't you come so that you could show off to people afterwards?"

"No, no, no!"

"If the devas conjure up a golden Buddha statue in front of your nose right now, or if there is one already in this cave from before,

don't you secretly think that it would be better to take it with you so that people can bow down to it and worship it, rather than just hanging around in this cave – don't you think about that kind of thing?"

I replied, "Are you crazy? Are you crazy? Are you crazy? To think such a thing!"

With this kind of internal questioning and answering, an overwhelming feeling of pīti arose that felt as if I could push through the mountain with a snap of my fingers. But I didn't succumb to the idea of trying because I had a balanced level of mindfulness and wisdom that was taking note: this is pīti, just pīti. I didn't lose control easily. I was aware that I had pīti under control because regardless of whether it was happiness, equanimity or pīti, they are all subject to the power of aniccaṁ. They arise, then change and pass away.

At this point I said to myself, "If you really think you have nothing to fear, then lay down now."

And then I put the robe on diagonally, with one shoulder uncovered, lay down on my right side, turned my attention back to the movement of the wind in the mindfulness of breathing, and fell fast asleep. I had no nimittas or dreams at all. I got up at three o'clock – that was an estimate, because I didn't have a watch to wind me up[73] like I do nowadays. And after getting up, my body and mind were refreshed. I felt enormously unburdened and light.

Sometimes perceptive contemplations came to me: "Now I'm here completely alone and physically secluded; the separation from the community while on the search for stillness makes me increasingly happy. I have found a cave in a high rock face where I put thoughts of urgency into my mind. They become the root cause behind the diligence and perseverance in meditation. Even if I groan when in [physical] pain, through the meditation all inner tension is released and sorrow is drawn out. This is because I am full of hope for liberation from all danger in the world of saṁsāra. With a precision and firmness, I devote myself to Nibbāna and turn my attention to the battle with Māra, I resist and fight. I rout out the māra of the defilements of the heart, not allowing him to return. Khandha-

māra, that is to say, these very five groups of existence here – the Supreme Teacher said they should not be grasped. If we grasp them, they become a heavy burden that will lead to our downfall. We flounder in the mire of the round of existence and perish in it because we are running after Māra. On all fours we crawl after this highwayman. He robs all beings, ties them up, brings them sorrow and grief. And this has been going on for a hundred thousand lifetimes to the power of two – it's impossible to count them all."

This contemplation once again prepared the way to enter the pīti zone. If I call it being flooded or saturated with pīti, that is accurate. If I say the pīti brought forth a sense of depth and pervasiveness in the Dhamma, that is also appropriate.

During my stay in Phraves Cave, my heart was completely absorbed. It didn't retreat, but instead inclined towards the path leading to the escape from suffering, in the fast lane, in this very life. The qualities of Nibbāna became the subject of contemplation: the means to completely eradicate the defilements of the heart and the mass of suffering within. Even such menial acts as excreting faeces and urine carried in their essence the quality of seclusion. But I still didn't think of myself as exceptional, perfect or having outgrown the foundation of the Dhamma in any respect. I only ever wanted to be unshakably subject to the power of Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, pervaded by utter sincerity and determination.

With a mind at that level and Dhamma at that level, being alone and secluded in the forest, on a mountain, it was as if I wanted to say: "Just old rice and other old dishes – but I have to be content with the food that is in front of me because if I take it with me to the forest, to the mountain, I cannot expect any other food."[74]

The taste of this food then improved many times over. It's for this reason that the teaching emphasises that we should delight in quiet places, jungle thickets and mountain forests. It never praises populated, noisy places. But if someone has never soaked up the taste of *kāyaviveka**, physical seclusion, it is of course hardly possible that *cittaviveka**, mental seclusion, will enter through any door. The same is true of seclusion from all acquisitions, *upadhiviveka**.

But those who have never absorbed the taste of seclusion will naturally think: "The atmosphere in noisy places is fine, it suits me because I am not closed off. I am surrounded by many people because I'm a modern, contemporary person. I don't have a lack of relatives and friends. I'm not a one-eyed coconut,[75] I'm not a person who has problems when I'm in the company of others. I'm not uncomfortable being around people."

In the vast majority of cases this is what we get to hear, yet we have to let it go and leave it to the world of socialising because kamma and its consequences vary from case to case.

Let us contemplate a few animal species, toads for example. They come out once a year en masse for a certain period of time where they become active. Apart from that they have to live in seclusion, each on its own. It is the same with frogs. This subject is worth contemplating. Kamma and its results have power over all who wander in saṁsāra. They apportion good and bad, according to the law of cause and effect, depending on what the respective individuals have managed to bring about. When they have brought something about, they have to bear the consequences, whether they like it or not. Whether they are aware of it or not is not the question at all, there must be an effect corresponding to the causes created. There is no partiality at all. The good way has its significance, the bad way as well.

On this subject of cause and effect, there are two distinct paths. One of these paths is worldly, the other supramundane. On the worldly path, the motivations of the heart emphasise a materialistic attitude. It is the boss, the great leader of intentions and moods. The motivations of the heart on the supramundane path emphasise moving towards alleviation and improvement, trying to temporarily override the defilements of the heart and the delusions of the ego, until finally the end of delusion is reached. Such things are dependent on the ego recognising its intentions and moods, otherwise the practice of Dhamma would become increasingly clouded. One wouldn't have any clarity in relation to oneself. True Dhamma and sincerity are made up of right mindfulness and wisdom, which is of course an individual matter.

While I was in that Phraves Cave, I found the following worthy of contemplation: "The lay people apparently have no idea about pavāraṇā, the invitation to [ask for] matches and candles. Maybe that's down to my kammic potential, that may well be. Or maybe the monks who were here before were very strict and didn't make any verbal references to it. But that is also a good, correct way of behaving towards the lay people. And they just have not extended any invitation. It simply doesn't occur to them to approach me, although it's really obvious. I haven't had matches and candles as a source of light for a long time. I haven't seen a rice straw mat or a cushion for a long time either." But the power of contentment, dedicated in life and death to the Buddha's teaching on the escape from suffering, made that lack seem an insignificant trifle. I was not a bit aggrieved by it.

Let us go back to that day when I arrived at the cave. I lay down for a moment in broad daylight to rest and stretch my limbs – about two minutes. My vision was clear. That's when I saw a tall, bulky man with dark skin, probably more than 40 years old, with his waist cloth tied high,[76] about four metres from where I was resting. He took two steps closer and reached me, showing a pushy attitude. Then he grabbed my testicles with both hands and pulled on them. Suddenly I felt very weak. Mindfulness brought up a memory in my mind: "Oh, so that's what you call a Phī Am ghost."[77]

I held my breath and lifted my right leg to forcefully push him away. As I pushed hard, I said *Bud* inwardly as I lifted my leg and *dho* as I pushed. I felt instantly relieved and at the same time the figure disappeared. It was possibly a demon, but the heart remained quite calm and free of fearful thoughts during the encounter. Because of this, I realised that ghosts really do exist – but that one never reappeared.

Mindfulness anchored in body and mind

The alms round actually went to Bān Kaeng. The village was a hundred rope lengths away. The lay people thought it was too far, so they divided up into groups, taking turns to shorten the way for me. They put alms food in the bowl for me at Sai Cave. There was also clean water there. They walked sixty rope lengths from the village to meet me. The monk walked forty rope lengths from the cave. They came every day to give alms. There was always a male layperson who was knowledgeable, who was neither deaf nor blind nor dumb as straw, and thus helped the monk avoid breaking any rules while he talked a little about Dhamma.[78] I finished my meal there and then, and there wasn't much time for a Dhamma conversation because I managed my time carefully and was back at my resting place at the cave shortly before nine o'clock.

The meditation practice went on continuously and without being forced. The heart could do it of its own accord, was absorbed in it of its own accord. Mindfulness didn't slip away from me. It was anchored in the foundation of body and mind. Bending and stretching the limbs, looking back and forth, I was with myself, with my heart, in the present, in the moment. I felt light in body and mind and very, very secluded. If I wanted to talk about the taste of the heart, the taste of the Dhamma, I wouldn't be able to find the right words because this taste is a very personal experience, beyond convention. It is the taste of the threefold seclusions: kāyaviveka, the quietness of the body; cittaviveka, the calmness of the heart; upadhiviveka, the silence of the defilements of the heart. When these three come together in a balanced way in the present, when they arise connected with each other at the same moment, then they become that taste of seclusion. A taste that doesn't get lost in definitions and that doesn't allow itself to be neatly pigeonholed, but rather is present in the here and now.

If someone really follows the Buddha's teaching, but is secretly only drawing on book knowledge that they have previously acquired; if they one-sidedly regard such knowledge as the sole means of purification; if they are a skilled speaker who impresses people with it because the desire for material gain dominates their

heart, then a mere banana leaf is better in comparison.[79] But it is still better than having learned nothing at all.

The author of these lines has a tendency to admonish himself because he is not yet good enough, because he still harbours the desire for the good within him. Because he is not yet full, the desire for the good flows out of him. Because he has yet to set out on the journey, on the search for the realms of arriving, that is, for the realms of enough. If we seek these realms of enough on the outside, on a journey on foot or by means of a vehicle, no matter for how many millions and millions of eons – the day, the month, the year and the moment will not come when we reach them. Since the realms of enough – or even of not-enough – exist solely in the land of the heart. The foreign land is the land of the defilements. The homeland is the land of the heart. But the foreign land, the land of the defilements, likes to lean on the land of the heart, harassing and surrounding it.

The realms of rust or non-rust exist within the land of iron. If there is iron, there is rust. If there is no rust, there is also no iron. But good quality iron has hardly any rust. Really good iron has no rust at all; and for the heart, exactly the same laws apply.

But when the heart is grasped by an owner, it is naturally impossible in the past, future and present world for it to be free from harm. When the heart is no longer grasped by any owner, it naturally stands on its own, unimpaired, alone, and is free from all harm. And when it has past, future and present at its command, there is no harm of any kind in it, no poison of any kind, and there is *niccaṁ**, it endures.

A painful farewell to Phraves Cave

After having spent more than 22 days alone and secluded in Phraves Cave, I recalled with a sense of urgency in the Dhamma: "Well, it's about time for the likes of us. I had resolved to go to Luang Pū Mun to surrender, without reservation, my body to him and to bequeath my life to him. But now I've been caught here and there over a long period of time. The formations of life are impermanent. It may be that I take my last breath before him. It may be that he breathes his last breath before I do."

As I contemplated like this, looking out of the corner of my eye at the cave and the immediate surroundings where I had been camped, so many tears flooded my cheeks that I had to wipe them away with my bathing cloth; for I was still so attached to that cave. But I was able to ease [the pain of parting] by giving the heart another direction, towards "*nānābhāvo vinābhāvo*"[80] – the inevitability of separation in accordance with the nature of the formations. And furthermore, I had the thought in my heart: "Devas of the mountains, trees and celestial bodies, I take leave of you and set off at once to seek out Phra Ācān Mun. I will ask him to take me in, so that I may realise the Buddha's Dhamma and practise in the direction of Nibbāna. May all of us abide in well-being, with Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, at all times. Whoever wants to arrive there, whether quickly or slowly, should turn towards this very Nibbāna."

Then I went on alms round and after the meal said to the lay people, "If nothing goes amiss, then I will walk all the way to the village tomorrow for alms, you don't have to meet me at the Sai Cave because I am taking my leave and heading down to the Phū Phān Mountains. I want to visit Phra Ācān Mun in Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue, in Phaṇṇā district, Sakon Nakhõn province. Time is pressing, my dear lay supporters."

The next morning, after getting up, I descended to Bān Kaeng. They gathered for almsgiving at the Bān Kaeng village temple. It was an abandoned temple with no monks. After the meal, I took my leave and set off. They accompanied me far enough so that I wouldn't get lost, then I sent them back. I walked alone, not having to worry about any companion, and followed a mountain range in a

westerly direction. By the time dusk fell I had made it to Bān Khõ. Got up early, alms round, ate the meal and then the journey continued. I reached Wat Pā Suddhāvās just as dusk was falling. I stayed there for three nights.

At that time, Phra Ācān Kū[81] was staying there. I went to Venerable Ācān and bowed. He asked me for news. When everything was settled, he gave me some advice for the practice, "Whoever wants to go to the Venerable Than Phra Ācān Mun must accept being a fool. He must let the Venerable Phra Ācān Mun straighten him out in order to be able to stay there. Even I was sometimes scolded by him just like a little novice." And then, of course, the Venerable Kū inquired, "So, do you have a strategy for staying there?" I indicated, "Yes, I offer my body and bequeath my life to be with Phra Ācān Mun. I forbid myself from thinking I am clever. If anything isn't fitting, the Venerable Ācān Mun may tell me every time."

"Mmm, very good. You have understood my discourse. My anumodanā to that. May you be well. But I advise you to spend a night or two in Phā Daen Cave first. As you're already in the vicinity, it's worth the detour. From here to the cave, it's more than more than[82] fourteen kilometres."

After three nights, I said goodbye to Venerable Kū after the meal. I passed by Bān Dong Mafai and reached Bān Nā Kap Kae. Then I climbed up the mountain. I reached Phā Daen Cave at about 4 pm. But there was a Luang Phõ Śrī living there together with a novice, and there was only enough room for two people to sleep in the cave. I didn't want to inconvenience them so I looked for a place to camp some distance away under a canopy of leaves at the foot of a tree. The heart was quiet and peaceful. It didn't protest and I didn't allow fear to take over the heart, something that in itself can be an obstacle to meditation. I thought to myself: "The next time I have the opportunity to stay here, I will come here alone. Because my heart has been completely taken by this place. There are tall, shady trees and cool, fresh air. There are rocky ridges under the wide sky that let you breathe deeply; there are enough flat places."

Khambong Cave is a dark cave, but inside there is running water that trickles out of a crevice. It has its own bathroom out of rock. It wasn't far from my resting place, about three rope lengths. It was clear to me that this place is a place of secluded Dhamma practice, for people who are truly set on escaping the suffering of saṁsāra; not a place for people who are after the four requisites and some kind of material benefit.

But that place inside, the place in the heart that is an inheritance from the past, that I definitely already knew. Wherever I went, I could lift it up because it was a light inheritance, it wasn't hard for me to carry. I didn't have to worry that robbers would steal it and loot it, or that termites would eat it, or that it might fall victim to a fire.

But, but … if we make it heavy, then it becomes really heavy. Heavy until the body breaks, until suicide. People have hanged themselves because of it, because their self is true and real according to convention and relativity. Whoever disputes this is like a one-eyed coconut, like a rabbit that simply cannot stand on one leg. Because such a person doesn't know about convention and relativity. If one doesn't recognise convention and relativity, how should one recognise liberation from them? If one doesn't recognise hot, how would one know what cold is? If one doesn't recognise gain, how would one know what loss is? If one doesn't recognise right, how would one know what wrong is? If one doesn't recognise evil, how would one know what merit is? If one doesn't recognise the rules of practice, how should one be able to practise? If one doesn't know the non-offence clauses, how would one know what is not an offence? Even if I were to continue on with this topic for quite a while, the meaning would always remain the same.

Views are a drug

It is normal for a worldling, a common person, to regard wrong as right. This view is the master of their intentions, in accordance with the nature of the khandhas. It is a drug that they are addicted to, until they realise more and more the disadvantage in it for themselves and subsequently turn away from it. In contrast, it is normal for a sage to regard right as right. It is increasingly right in two respects because right view is the master of his intentions. It is a drug, an addiction to being on the right path, an addiction that doesn't cause any problems.

But here I would like to leave the arahant out because it isn't at all appropriate to associate arahants with any kinds of drugs and addictions. That would be a rash statement.

In a flash, it's possible for anything to become a drug: the alms round, eating, drinking, talking, thinking, teaching, sitting, lying down, standing and walking, silence and wise answers on the subject of equanimity.

The worldling, the common person (this no longer applies to stream-enterers and upwards) claims that Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha are to be found on the straight path as well as on detours. They cling to the nature of the khandhas by day and by night, sometimes they realise it, sometimes they don't. But it is also not wrong to say that they have no idea at all, for example, when contrary to the Buddha's teaching they claim that the killing of small animals is wrong because one doesn't get full from it, but that the slaughter of large animals is therefore good because it benefits the belly. Let's move on to the subject of alcohol – they also claim that getting drunk just once in a while isn't such a bad thing!

The paths into the abyss, the pits of hell, are reason enough to not let what you have in front of you go to hell. Enough to strip away all anger, isn't it? You ask, "How is that to be done?" I say, "Just like that!" And then they hang around aimlessly with monks.

Some monks take ordination, wanting to escape suffering in saṁsāra by escaping from the life of a householder. Their doctrinal interpretation puts a lot of emphasis on "very, very deep" Dhamma.

Whatever word, chapter, section they teach, they get hung up on numbers and classifications – a waste of time for the monk and for those who visit him. Neither side gets any benefit from it. And he doesn't exactly cover himself and his centre in glitter and glory, and neither do his visitors. This is called the misappropriation of the teachings of the Buddha. They are being trampled on and destroyed because of carelessness. And they even think it's funny. This is truly a practice of suffering, and not the slightest bit of well-being will dilute it.

But some monks of a different stripe take ordination because of the four requisites, with material considerations ruling their hearts. They run after each other, become a faction. If one doesn't talk about this, it won't be uncovered. If one talks a lot about it, then there is the threat of a violent death. The smallest patch of ground – instead of being a place for outer rest, where the beautiful and the good can develop, where suffering in the realm of the mind can be escaped, and the heart can be raised from the level it has been obsessed with for so long – every patch of ground becomes a glowing coal pit, and they constantly keep adding firewood to boot. They cannot stop. The firewood is a magical fuel, it is the heart that deviates from the Dhamma of ethics. This is called the development of the magical fuel that burns the world because of heedlessness in all its aspects.

The threefold practice

But where does one obtain the magical fuel with which one can burn out the defilements of the heart? The Supreme Teacher and his noble followers have already found it for us. Even if we were to burn out everything in the three worlds with it, we still wouldn't run out of fuel. This fire burns with [three aspects], namely ethics, concentration and wisdom, but they have only one meaning, one that points to the heart, to every aspect of form and name. *Ariyadhamme ṭhito naro* (the noble Dhamma is anchored in a person[83]).

*Sīla, samādhi, paññā** – ethics, concentration, wisdom – are the path of this very teaching of the Buddha. It is correct to call them

the fire fighters of the world. To call them a medicine, a remedy, is also correct. If one calls them the fire or the fuel which burns out the defilements of the heart, that too is correct. One can also say that they are glasses that show the eyes and the heart the way to the cool shade, that's not incorrect. The ethical path, the path of concentration, the path of wisdom and the fruits of ethics, the fruits of concentration, the fruits of wisdom – about all of these things one can also speak. Or the way of the mind and the fruit of the mind. You can use many terms of expression, but they have one and the same meaning, like a pot full of soup. Once we have started eating, something arises that has the meaning of "feeling full in the stomach" at the moment when we have eaten enough. The meaning depends on the refined state of a mind that has enough mindfulness and wisdom as to be able to grasp it immediately; a mind that also truly understands sīla, samādhi, paññā, which we can take as being a triad, a group of three.

If we take this further, it becomes a root that branches out into the 84,000 groups of the Dhamma. If we shorten it to one aspect, it becomes the One mind, the One Dhamma in the present. If we shorten it to two aspects, it becomes body and mind, or Dhamma and Vinaya, or the nāma group and rūpa group. Whether one says a lot or a little about it, it all springs from this present person. No matter how many heaps, not matter how many millions and millions of uncountables, it all springs from the One in the present moment. Even if we go back into the past, we still start jumping from the present. If we have hopes and expectations or speculate about the future, we also start jumping from the present. No matter how true or untrue it may be, it is dependent on the present, on our watchfulness. In terms of the highest, deepest Dhamma, it is not our job to pick out right and wrong in relation to past and future. One who doesn't know the taste of the mind of the present, and of the Dhamma of the present, naturally feels dejected in the practice of Dhamma within the Buddha's teaching. And they don't know about branching out and trimming back. They violate the principle of *saṅgaho*, of gathering together. They violate the principle of *asaṅgaho*, which doesn't foster gathering together, that is, the principle of branching out.[84] Branching out or not – once you know

what you're doing, there's no doubt about the mode of expression, whether it's concise or detailed.

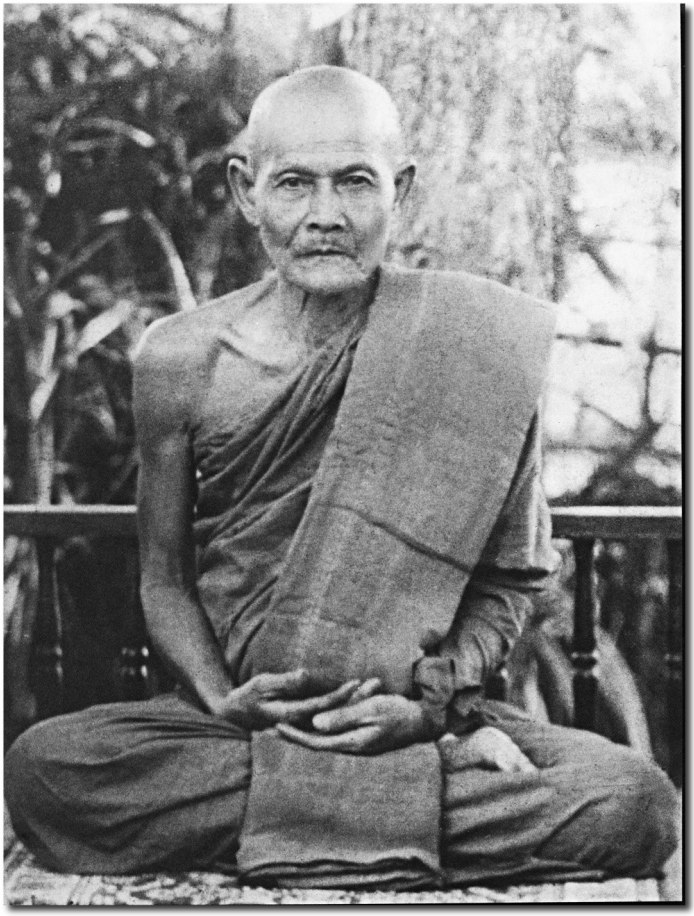
Let us return to the account of my departure from Phā Daen Mountain. I stayed there overnight, went for alms, took my meal and left at about two o'clock in the afternoon. I took back ways and went to Bān Nā Nok Khao the same day. There I spent the night in the middle of a field east of the village, but it was gradually getting cold towards the end of the [cold] season.

I spread my [bathing] cloth out on the bare ground. There were no leaves to use as an underlayer. Hay and straw were also out of reach because cattle and buffalo had eaten everything away. I could not hang up my mosquito net. I just set up my klod, placed it down diagonally next to me and put my head under it. The upper part of my body and legs were not covered. I lay down and watched my breath. My heart, my mindfulness stayed with the breath, which was very gentle. I didn't stray off anywhere. My gaze was clear, I wasn't sleepy and I didn't feel lost. For me, it was as if I hadn't slept at all because no dreams arose. Body and mind were quite untroubled. But my robe, which I had put on diagonally with my shoulders bare, was soaking wet from the dew, from my upper body down to my shins. I hadn't wrapped my feet in cloth for fear of dirtying it. That is to say, I hadn't washed my feet.

I got up early, went to Bān Nā Nok Khao for alms, left the village and took my leave when everything was settled. The route headed westwards along the foothills of the mountains. At one point I crossed the motor road from Sakon Nakhõn to Kāḷasin. But at that time there were no cars going to Kāḷasin because the road had not yet been completed. Then I passed Bān Phohn Ngām and reached Bān Phra Kham Phū at nightfall. I spent the night in an abandoned temple, marched on in the morning after the alms round and meal, passed Bān Ūn Dong and reached Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue around noon. My heart was filled with a deep feeling of relief.

With the master (1946)

Whatever iron we may be made of, no matter how fine, we must first allow ourselves to be forged, to be polished, to be rinsed and sharpened on a stone in order for us to become fit for purpose. Otherwise, nothing is accomplished.



Luang Pū Mun Bhūridatto

With the master

Body and life bequeathed to Phra Ācān Mun

At that time, the Venerable Ācān and the monastic community were busy making cloth pads for the alms bowls.[85] Venerable Phra Ācān quickly put on his upper robe, with one shoulder uncovered, and sat down ready to receive me. I placed my requisites in an appropriate place and bowed down to the Venerable Ācān. He graciously asked, "Where have you come from?" In awe, I stated, "I have come from Phraves Cave". He asked, "How is the meditation?" I replied, "Nothing yet. I guess I'm just practising out of a sense of faith." In reality, I would have liked to have talked about the experience I had had with the explosive thunder that had made all the mountains shake, but as a newcomer I preferred to save that for later because a lot of monks were listening in to what I was sharing, and because I wasn't yet familiar with, and connected with any of the venerable monks. It would have looked like I was showing off.

Regaining my composure, I plucked up the courage. Then I threw myself down on the floorboards of the sālā and without looking up from the floor said, "I hereby surrender my body to Phra Ācān and bequeath my life to him with every breath, as well as to every single venerable monk in the monastic community here. My humble self had wanted to come here last year, but Than Cao Khuṇ Debkavī told me to first practise meditation with Luang Phõ Bunmī in Wat Pā Nõng Nam Khem in that year." The Venerable Ācān listened and then told some monks and novices to take my requisites to a vacant kuṭi. I bowed and followed my requisites to my lodgings.

It was then April, half month of the waxing moon, but I have forgotten the day because I didn't look at the calendar. It was in 1946. Ācān Mahā Bua[86] had arrived before me. Phra Ācān Wan[87] had arrived a month before me as well, but in the same year. Ācān

Thõngkham,[88] too, had arrived before Phra Ācān Wan, but also in the same year. When I think back like this, there is a feeling of being moved by the Dhamma that doesn't fade.

When five days had passed, I bowed at his feet and asked for nissaya, which the master graciously granted. Phra Ācān Mahā Bua took the opportunity, unnoticed by Luang Pū Mun, to kindly admonish me, "But do it properly, alright! If you have already dedicated yourself to the master with all your heart and mind like this, then you also have to really go full blast. For the master it is very important to know whether you are serious, as you surrender your body and bequeath your life, or whether you are only pretending, with hollow talk, and then, for example, disregarding the rules of the teachers. If we give a blacksmith iron to forge, then that blacksmith must strike it until it is fit to be made into a knife or a sickle. And they must get to know the iron. They cannot use iron from the sediment in the furnace. This they return to its former owner. But if it is solid iron, then they heat it up until it is red hot and then strike it with full force, Than Lā! The forging becomes increasingly intense, but it isn't the iron's job to set conditions and make rules. The blacksmith is the one who forges. Is that clear, Than Lā? You should know these things right from the start. I only mean well for you, because we are both from Udõn. Even with me, the master has already gone all out, making use of various skilful means, *upāya**. When parents raise their children with the utmost firmness and with various different methods, they do so out of a love for their children that comes from the bottom of their hearts."

While Phra Ācān Mahā Bua gave me this talk and these upāyas, I held my hands raised in añjali and listened. I sat quietly and contemplated, following the flow of his talk. When he finished, he returned to his lodgings. When I had reflected on it, I realised that Venerable Ācān Mahā Bua's words were a veritable treasure chest, that he had placed genuine jewels in my possession. In the Bān Nõng Phue period, he was truly and completely the right hand of Luang Pū Mun. And what about the other Khrū Bā Ācāns from the ranks of the greats – well, they weren't his right hand? Yes, they were, and wholeheartedly, but those venerable monks were the heads of monasteries in other places. This statement specifically

refers just to the group during the Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue period. I don't in any way mean to disparage or disrespect the old, earlier ranks.

When I tell of the Bān Nõng Phue time, when I had surrendered my body and bequeathed my life, I also remember the practices of the Great Phra Ācān Mun and the practice of Phra Ācān Mahā Bua, for the stories from that time are connected like constellations in the night sky. It is my own story, viewed through the eye of contemplation, viewed through the heart. In the practice I followed the master, and my own mindfulness and wisdom. But even if we are just a crow grasping for a mountain of gold, or a frog guarding a lotus flower, our only task is to know ourselves. We need to be a disciple who has an outer teacher, an inner teacher, the teacher of the mind, the teacher of the heart, the teacher of study, of practice and of the realisation of path, fruit and Nibbāna. We don't need a teacher of automatic proclamation as we see fit. If we lack the ability to listen and the ability to reflect, to discern good and bad things by proper means, then it becomes difficult. Whatever iron we may be made of, no matter how fine, we must first allow ourselves to be forged, to be polished, to be rinsed and sharpened on a stone in order for us to become fit for purpose. Otherwise, nothing is accomplished.

Some monks who lose sight of themselves attain sufficient goodness and for this they want to be praised and extolled by the Khrū Bā Ācān exclusively and constantly. To put it simply, they are addicted to praise. You can find monks such as these very easily and in droves, but they are merely shelf warmers. Good Khrū Bā Ācāns naturally encourage their students when they behave well. Whenever they behave badly, they get in each other's way. To be in the way, whether at the right time or the wrong time, whether gently or violently, depends on the particular situation. It's not the student's job to tell their teacher what to do. It's not the job of the iron to tell the blacksmith what to do: "When there are a lot of people standing around the furnace don't heat me up so much, not to red heat, and don't pound on me so hard, okay? That wouldn't be polite." It can't be the iron's job to make up any rules. The blacksmith

will strike it in such a way that his visitors can get an idea of his skills as a blacksmith, perhaps even several times in a row.

One turns onto a way and off a way when the time is right. If it is not like that, then it is also not the time. It is the same with the mind, with the heart, with the inside. If it turns to the way of *kāma-vitakka*, that is, the way of sensual thoughts, or *byāpādavitakka*, the way of thoughts of ill will, or *vihiṁsāvitakka*, the way of cruel thoughts, then it must turn around and return to the former state. Otherwise, it will become cold to the point of becoming inedible. One can no longer eat, and suffers from nausea and stomach cramps.

Ācariyavatta – Duties towards the teacher

I want to say some more about my stay during the Nõng Phue period, for example about the master's personal khõ wat, what he did, how he guided his disciples, how he guided the lay people. The account will be quite jumbled because I have no experience in writing and arranging, as I mentioned at the beginning.

This was what Ācān Mun's personal daily khõ wat looked like: in the middle of the night at three o'clock, he quietly washed his face and rinsed his mouth using a wide-rimmed spittoon. Then he put on his upper robe in a formal manner, with his right shoulder uncovered, bowed to the Buddha and recited quietly in his hut, on some days for quite a long time, up to 30 minutes. His voice was audible but I don't know what the texts were because to eavesdrop is like stealing, and I didn't dare do either.

After he had finished reciting, he sat down to meditate, lighting a tiny lantern next to his mosquito net. He meditated until it was light, until the new day had dawned. His disciples would go together and wait for him in order to perform their morning duties towards him. At the end of the last watch of the night, he would come out of his hut deliberately and quietly. Not a word was spoken, not even a whisper. Then, when Venerable Ācān made himself heard with a soft clearing of his throat, it was time. Slowly the

door opened, and when he stepped out onto the verandah, each of us went about our respective personal tasks.

One received the alms bowl, nothing else. One received the upper robe, one put the lower robe on him, one tied the belt, one received the towel out of the Venerable Ācān's hand. After changing the bathing cloth [that he wore at night], it was handed [folded] back to him. One took the spittoon to rinse. One swept the hut; one swept the path under the roof, the verandah for walking meditation. One waited at the bottom of the stairs to help him slip into his sandals. One took the walking stick to have it ready at the eating sālā, so that it could be handed over to him for the alms round. One placed a clay stove at the beginning and the end of his walking meditation path, both with glowing charcoal, and observed the situation there, for as soon as Venerable Ācān would go to the sālā, the attendant would take one of the stoves and hand it to him in the eating sālā. The other stove would be quickly put away. Venerable Ācān always practised walking meditation before the alms round.

When it was time, he went to the sālā, which was about a rope length from his hut. The attendant who looked after the clay stoves would then carry one behind him and place it near the place where he sat to eat. For the Venerable Ācān was always cold because his inner fire element was too weak, and he warmed his bathing cloth and upper robe by the stove, fanning himself with the warm air.

I want to make it clear that there were many disciples who took nissaya, the training bond, seriously and who all had to have a clear area of responsibility towards the teacher, while not getting in each other's way. Everyone had their own task, which was done on time and in the perfect sequence, in silence, quietly and without a mess. Only when someone became ill did he temporarily hand over his post to someone else. As soon as he was well again, he resumed his duties as before. As for the communal work – e.g., sweeping the monastery grounds, drawing water, looking after the fire shed and the eating place – everyone had to do their share, as a part of the collective effort. It wasn't necessary to ring the bell to call the monks to work at the appointed time. As for the time one had for oneself, one had to be clear that anyone who let the reins slip and

wasted his time would be in for a drubbing in front of the assembled saṅgha. And also in front of lay people – the Venerable Ācān didn't show any consideration here and also spoke about such things in front of a mixed audience.

Preparation for the alms round

I would like to say something about the preparation for the alms round. When Venerable Ācān reached the stairs to the sālā, someone was already waiting there to take off his sandals and put them in a suitable place. He took care that they didn't get wet, because they were made of leather. One of them scooped water with his right hand to wash the Venerable Ācān's feet, and with his left hand he scrubbed his feet all around, from shin to sole. Pouring, scrubbing, pouring, scrubbing, quickly and without any tugging and without any sign of unwillingness. Another was already standing by to dry his feet, again quickly, but with mindfulness, not too roughly, not too gently. Then Venerable Ācān climbed the stairs to the eating sālā. He didn't sit down to bow because there wasn't a Buddha statue in the sālā (there was, however, a Buddha statue in the sālā for holding the *Uposatha**).

Then someone helped him put on the saṅghāṭi over the upper robe as a second layer, except on days when it looked like rain. When putting on the two robes one on top of the other, two monks had to work together. One helped with two or three turns of the roll of cloth and closed the button loops at the neck, the other closed the lower button loops. When going to the village, it was very important for Venerable Ācān that everyone wore the saṅghāṭi over the upper robe, with the lower and upper loops buttoned up. Just like wearing a lower robe with *khaṇḍas**, e.g., when doing errands in the village, during the alms round and when reciting.

He related, "When putting on the upper and lower robes, Sri Lankan monks like to wear the *anuvāta**, the doubled border, inwards so that the actual robe-cloth doesn't wear out before the anuvāta. But it does not matter whether one wears a robe with the anuvāta facing inwards or outwards, it is not a violation of the

Vinaya. And if one reverses the robe daily and alternately wears one side up or down, and then the other side up or down, that too doesn't violate the Vinaya." The idea was that both sides should wear evenly on the shins. This is how the Venerable Ācān had explained it.

The author of these lines listened with open ears, looked with open eyes and willingly took note of everything. If I hadn't written everything down in detail, the memory of this period of Luang Pū Mun's life in Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue would have faded. That would be inappropriate for an author who for more than four years was the frog guarding the lotus flower and the crow grasping for a mountain of gold. For this Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue period was Luang Pū Mun's last, and the one in which he gathered more disciples around him than in any other.

In this monastery, everything that was of use to the disciples was used as a bridge, there's nothing more to say about it. The Venerable Ācān sometimes wore his saṅghāṭi and the upper robe this way round, and sometimes the other way round, alternating every day. The disciples who put the two robes together before putting them on, needed mindfulness so as to remember which side they should have facing upwards so that the robes were put on correctly each day, that is correctly in the sense of the Dhamma wish of the Venerable Ācān.

These fragmented memories, mixed from here and there and pieced together, are integral aspects of the practice of the master and also of his disciples, written down so that in the present and the future it can be ascertained to what extent there has been a dwindling, a degeneration and a change in the khõ wat over the course of time. When I write about the monastic form and practice of the elders in the dhutaṅga tradition of the past in the Bangkok era,[89] I am already afraid of rocking this present world. But the author also has the time of the Buddha as a point of reference, as a decisive and definitive controlling authority – the bhikkhus [in the canonical scriptures] who preceded us, who applied themselves fully and fought doggedly without letting up in every chapter, in every section. Those who consider themselves strict practitioners today

would have been considered "still usable" in the Buddha's time. Those who consider themselves mediocre would probably have been considered "almost adequate" in the time of the Buddha. Those who view themselves as somewhat slack, would at the time of the Buddha have been considered "bad to the point of vomiting".

That is quite possible. At the time of the Buddha, practising walking meditation until the feet split open was considered too strict. But nowadays they walk, bang into a stone so that a little blood flows, and already they are talking about how much they endure and how strict they are. The fact that they weren't mindful, they don't talk about that. That is something to think about.

But even if my words sound so good – I am by no means good. Good only at talking. But I write it down to shake myself up whenever I need to. Writing and arranging were not particularly encouraged by Luang Pū Mun because the Venerable Ācān felt that the Buddha had already left enough scriptures.

At six o'clock it was time to go on alms round. In Nõng Phue village it was customary that someone would strike a resonating piece of wood for three rounds as a signal that could be heard from far and wide, in order for the villagers to prepare for almsgiving, but as soon as the monks reached the edge of the village, he would strike three more rounds. They stood in groups packed closely together in a row. With each group there was a long sitting bench covered with a white cloth, and for Luang Pū Mun they prepared an extra bench, a higher one. First the alms were received standing up, then all the monks sat down and gave the blessing together. Then it was on to the next group with the same procedure. After three groups, they all returned to the monastery.

Luang Pū Mun was the last to return, with another monk accompanying him. A few male lay people came with them to the monastery and took the bowl from the senior monks, four, five, six men every day, without exception. The junior monks, who still had to observe nissaya, and also the novices hurried to get back to the monastery before them, so that they could be in time to perform the duties towards the Khrū Bā Ācāns, e.g. washing and drying their

feet, receiving saṅghāṭis and upper robes, or preparing the bowl and the eating place.

During the rains retreat, the monks and novices didn't accept any more food once they had entered the monastery grounds. Only for Luang Pū did they prepare special food, vegetables were cut into small pieces, rice was pounded in a mortar. Venerable Ācān couldn't chew very well because he no longer had teeth. He had dentures. The rice from the alms round from his bowl was pounded together with various other dishes and placed in a bowl near him. And then he helped himself and put it into the alms bowl. The Venerable Ācān ate everything together out of the alms bowl, both sweet and savoury, and he didn't use a spoon either. He was offered a small cup with a lid, half full with Ovaltine. He took three or four sips from it after the meal, never all of it. But before he lowered his hand to eat, everyone would give the blessing together – sometimes the normal text, sometimes "Sabbabuddhā",[90] for the harvest festival or the autumn festival sometimes "Bāhuṁ".[91] The hands were not raised together to give the blessing, nor was "Bāhuṁ" recited while food was still being placed in the bowls.[92] The Venerable Ācān didn't allow this. He felt it was disrespectful to the Dhamma. So, first food into the bowl, then recite or give the normal food blessing. But before starting to eat, the master would lower his gaze and contemplate the meal in the bowl for an appropriate amount of time. Also, he didn't start eating until the monks and novices had finished getting their various things ready. After that, there was no talking during the meal apart from in very urgent cases, and then not with the mouth full of food, and only very, very little. It was very orderly, with mindfulness in every movement of the body, when touching and placing, when bending and stretching the limbs, left and right.

Daily duties with Master Luang Pū Mun

Let us return to the subject of food that was brought into the monastery which was not accepted during the rainy season. It was an internal rule that had originated from Luang Pū Mahā, which he directed the monastic community to follow in order to keep all

bustle and thronging masses away from Luang Pū Mun. Luang Pū Mun simply remarked, "The food we are given is in keeping with the Dhamma. It was put in the bowl and the monks share it with each other. It doesn't matter whether this takes place inside or outside the monastery. In his time, the Buddha had five new disciples during the initial phase, Kondañña, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji. One of them was assigned the task of looking after the requisites while the others went on alms round to feed them all. If they had wanted to forgo the service of sharing, who would have done the sharing for them? But as for the aspect of [accepting] outside or inside the monastery, I am not dictating this to you, do it according to your own inspiration."

Fasting, abstaining from the meal, wasn't practised very intensively during Luang Pū Mun's time in Nõng Phue. Those who did, only skipped a single day. In that very year 1946, there was a Sergeant Phan[93] who [also] fasted only for one day. Perhaps the reason for this was the restriction imposed by the khõ wat – no one wanted to neglect their duties in relation to Luang Pū Mun and the community.

As far as I could tell at the time, Than Phra Ācān Mahā Bua, whom we now call Luang Pū Mahā, would have liked to have fasted during the time he stayed with Luang Pū Mun, but in his heart he had the following consideration: I am the one responsible here under the master. I have to watch the master. How much does he eat per day, how much rice, how much of each of the other dishes does he eat? I have to establish that every day to make sure that he gets the right amount according to that which comes in and is in keeping with the Dhamma. Even though the Venerable Ācān can take something for himself and put it in the bowl, I would like to reserve the right to know what he takes because I am very concerned about the master. When Venerable Ācān eats properly, I can relax. If he cannot eat, I am interested in the reason.

The next topic to turn to now is a continuation of the previous one. How quickly did Luang Pū Mun finish eating? After an appropriate amount of time and moderately fast. If he had finished eating very quickly, the monks and novices would have suffered.[94] If he

had finished eating very slowly, the monks and novices would have taken it as an example. That would probably have been the reason, meaning that this assumption is based on observation and conjecture. The master himself had only explained that feeling too full wasn't good and that feeling too hungry wasn't good either. The right measure was a matter for each individual to find out for themselves.

The same went for sitting, lying down, standing and walking. Sitting meant sitting meditation. And the same went for standing, walking and lying down. But when the words lying down referred to sleeping, then four hours a day and night were considered the right amount. When eating, it was recommended to stop four or five bites before reaching the point of feeling full and to drink water until it was enough. For walking meditation, it could be at least three, four, five hours per day and night. The term "let's go" meant that when I wasn't sick, I occasionally practised walking meditation from five in the afternoon until dawn. Walking as meditation, not as a way to pass the time!

Regarding the ending of Luang Pū Mun's meal: the master went to the toilet. The monks and novices hurried to wash the bowls and tidy up the requisites to be there in time for the master. When he went to the toilet, one of them would follow him to attend to different duties, like quickly pouring water into a bamboo tub and having it made ready. In cold weather, he would quickly mix warm water and put it in the tub for washing the body. Or he had already mixed the washing water and had put it in a special can. And then he waited nearby. When the master came out, he quickly took the can from him.

Receiving something from the master's hand, or handing him anything had to be done with both hands in a courteous and appropriately respectful manner. Dilly-dallying or displays of familiarity in which one lost sight of one's own situation were out of the question. If we let our polite manners slip into carelessness even for a moment, the master knew it immediately. Afterwards, he wouldn't let us get close to him and used various and diverse methods to reprimand us. If we improved and behaved well, he too was goodness

itself. If someone didn't improve, then he didn't have to wait long before being thrown out. Dear old impermanence ensured that we couldn't be swayed into complacency while staying with the master.

Neither can a blacksmith sleep and look at the iron with indifference. He must strike it, forge it, so that it becomes a knife, a hoe, a chisel, an axe. If it's iron from the furnace dregs, then he can't use it, and he'll throw it away because it's at his disposal.

The meal in Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue

Coming back to the subject of preparing the meal and the meal itself. Outside the rains retreat, a sharing of the meal normally had to take place as a communal activity in the eating sālā. Anyone who was only concerned about his own bowl during this time of mutual sharing and distribution, who didn't prick up his ears, didn't keep his eyes open and didn't promptly help with the distribution, who only feared that the group wouldn't give him anything, who only sat there and guarded his bowl, had to endure a heavy sermon in that same moment.

But one who was inwardly ready for sacrifice and renunciation in such a way thought like this: "If it doesn't please the community to put something in my bowl, then I don't necessarily have to eat. I like to take part in the sharing, to take part in the fulfilment of one's duty to Phra Ācān and the community. Only when everything is done without flaw do I sit down and take care of my bowl." Whoever practised like this was a blessing to the monastery. If he made mistakes in other areas and had to endure a thunderbolt, it wasn't a very severe thunderbolt. This was because the power of openness and friendship in the monastery had a pulling effect that made it possible to let go of any internal tension in relation to other issues. It also made things uncomplicated for the Khrū Bā Ācān and the circle of friends. This was true even for the [other three of the] four necessities: robes, shelter and medicine. The fat ego had to let go and leave the matter in the hands of the Khrū Bā Ācān. And in the circle of friends, one stood up for the other, there was no need to be

petty. The bhikkhus and sāmaṇeras who practised in the monastery in such a way were the embodiment of deep *Dhammavinaya** and are, furthermore, the object of reverence in the circle of friends to this day.

Moving on to the subject of dividing the food. The eating sālā was grass-covered, with a floor of split bamboo, about four metres by five metres. Spittoons and water containers were made of thick bamboo cane. When the food was divided up, the spittoons had to be put away neatly beforehand. They could only be put into place after the food had been divided because the bamboo floor swayed and wobbled so much. Walking around would have caused the spittoons to tip over.[95]

It was very quiet during the meal. No one made crunching or cracking noises while chewing, e.g., with nuts or red makhuea, which were sometimes available. If one put something in one's mouth, one had to first consider whether or not there would be a cracking sound if one began chewing right away. If not, we could go ahead and chew. If a cracking sound was to be expected, we had to bite things very gently and only then begin chewing. Phra Ācān Mahā Bua explained to me that this rule was a part of the practice because, according to the Vinaya, one mustn't make loud munching or slurping noises while eating. But loud cracking sounds are just as wrong because they sound like a dog crushing bones or a tiger biting bones.

I also want to elaborate on the following topic, because it hasn't yet been dealt with in sufficient detail. After lunch, the Great Teacher went to the toilet, an old-style toilet, with a three-metre-deep hole in the ground, made especially for him, one metre seventy-five wide.[96] Old-style toilets like this also had a pee trough. When Venerable Ācān went in to excrete, he took off his sandals and placed them neatly side by side, not criss-crossed. He opened the door mindfully, without any clanging noise. He peed in the trough and poured water in to rinse. After defecating, he wiped himself with dry banana leaves that were kept rolled up and more than a span long. These were provided by his disciples because Ven-

erable Ācān had haemorrhoids on his anus. There was no toilet paper at that time.

The master didn't tread on written paper, no matter what the origin. He didn't use it to line the spittoon. He didn't use it to wipe the excretory pathways for faeces and urine. The master often said, "Writing, of any kind, can be used to record the teachings of the fully Awakened One. Therefore, it should be treated with respect."

When the master had finished excreting and had wiped himself properly, he would slowly and gently open the door and come out in an orderly manner without any clattering noises. He did it in a way that was both very inspiring and also went straight to the heart. Contemplating this, I felt as if I was delighting in a millionaire's treasure. But it is better to enjoy a millionaire's treasure, which is their own, than a thief's treasure, which the thief must first take.[97] Having finished the excretion process, properly in every respect, the Venerable Ācān returned to his hut to rest and then to attend to his private meditation business.

Points of practice with Luang Pū Mun

Shortly after one o'clock in the afternoon, the Venerable Ācān usually came down from his hut to change his bodily posture.[98] At about four o'clock in the afternoon, everyone swept the monastery grounds together. No one shirked from doing this, except in cases of illness or when someone had to tend to a sick bhikkhu. After that, water was carried briskly, both drinking and service water, until the barrels were full – usually about 40 canisters a day, sometimes more, such as on washing days or when many monks came to visit. Once that was done, Luang Pū Mun was bathed. Afterwards, everyone bathed at their kuṭi, not together at the well. But the well wasn't far, it was on the edge of the monastery and it never dried up. It had fresh, clean, cool water that was poured through a cloth filter into a wide wooden trough. Ācān Mahā Bua was the senior monk in charge, but we didn't let him draw or carry the water. He was just the head of the group, the leader, whether it was for water or firewood.

Then bathing Luang Pū. By then, novices and anāgārikas had already heated up the water. The monks and novices in charge of bathing did not get rotated, except for those who scrubbed Luang Pū's legs. But those who put the bathing cloth on him and changed his robe, who mixed the hot bathing water, who put the sitting stool in place and then put it away, who took care of the fire in the clay stoves, who waited to put on his sandals – those were not rotated.

I myself was also never rotated, because I had duties with bathing and in other areas. Once you had offered your services in a certain area, you then had to do it on a regular basis. So that way there was no confusion, no mix-ups and no crowding each other out (as for communal duties, well that's another story). When it came to the daily and nightly duties the disciples had towards the Venerable Ācān, each had his own responsibilities.

I was properly saturated with a multitude of duties towards the Venerable Ācān, namely:

1. Rise early and quickly get fires going in the clay ovens in order to place them under the Venerable Ācān's quarters; let the hot air rise to drive away the cold.

2. If the Venerable Ācān's elements were not in order and he had excreted into the hole under his quarters in the middle of the night: quickly gather it up with the hands. That is, scoop it up with bare hands and put it in a basket lined first with banana leaves and then with a layer of ash. So I scooped the excrement out of the hole with my bare hands and put it in that basket. The hole had been lined with a thick layer of ash beforehand and closed with a lid during the day. At nightfall, quickly open the lid, before daybreak quickly go there and take a look, but very quietly. If there were traces of excrement, quickly gather them up. Then quickly wash hands with ash and paraffin. And keep the fingernails trimmed short. Luang Pū Mahā Bua spoke about the rule of scooping with bare hands, but not in the presence of Luang Pū Mun. He said, "For a master with this stage of realisation, you shouldn't take a hoe and spade, you should use your bare hand to scoop." So much for that. I took it as a priceless, invaluable blessing to me.

3. When he came out of his room in the morning, quickly bring out a clay stove from under his quarters, take it upstairs and wait for him to receive it on the verandah. Wait to receive the towel he had brought from the sleeping room and hand it back to him with both hands as soon as *Khrū Bā** Wan had finished putting on the lower robe.

4. When Venerable Ācān came down to practise walking meditation in the morning, carry the fire quickly behind him and put it at the beginning of the walking track. Then keep an eye out there because I was afraid the Venerable Ācān might fall into the fire.

5. When Venerable Ācān went to the sālā in preparation for the alms round, carry a clay stove behind him and place it close enough to his sitting place.

6. Back from the alms round, check on the fire and quickly examine my own bowl to see if there was any alms food that might be suitable for the Venerable Ācān. Then quickly help the fellow monks to prepare the food. And not just sit there guarding my own bowl, like a paralysed frog on land.

7. After the meal, quickly wash my own bowl, dry it and take it to my own kuṭi. Around midday there was free time and an opportunity to put the bowl out in the sun.[99]

8. Quickly bring Than Ācān Mahā Bua's bowl to his kuṭi. He put the bowl out in the sun himself.

9. Return quickly and bring a clay stove to Luang Pū's accommodation in good time. Not allowing him to arrive there before the clay stove.

10. Establishing whether the Venerable Ācān was already warm or still cold, and taking my time in doing so – but not when carrying the stove away and putting it out.

11. On some days, when Venerable Ācān was cold, prepare a plank bed outside his room for him to rest on. He would lie down there, but he wouldn't sleep; rather, he would meditate quietly. I then had to move the fire close to the plank bed. If he didn't want that, then pull the fire away again. If he didn't mind, he stayed quiet

and meditated. I then had to sit close to the plank bed and keep watch. If Venerable Ācān asked anything, I gave a short and precise answer without digressing. But this was uncertain. Sometimes I would sit there and watch until midday. Even at nightfall, it was necessary to linger around there, to get the fire going and keep an eye out. It wasn't in any way that the Venerable Ācān or the saṅgha compelled me to do this. I did it out of my own sense of confidence.

12. When it was time to wash or dye for the Venerable Ācān, I had to join the dyeing troop, the washing troop, the drying troop, the folders, Luang Pū Mahā's cutting troop, Than Ācān Wan's sewing troop, the medicine dispensers Ācān Wan and Ācān Thõngkham, and to prepare the sleeping place and stow away the alms bowl – this also with Ācān Wan and Ācān Thõngkham.

While preparing the sleeping place, Luang Pū gave the following "skilful means of practice"[100] in the presence of Ācān Wan, "Than Lā, you are not able to prepare the sleeping place properly together with him. You only take the coarse and heavy." He spoke calmly and gently, but I took it to heart. If Ācān Mahā had been able to hear it at that time, he would have already taught me how to properly get the sleeping place ready.

There was only one thing that I could not bear and I also told Ācān Mahā: there was a monk who prepared Luang Pū Mun's sleeping place and traipsed with his whole foot [on the sheet]. And then he also stepped over some of Venerable Ācān's requisites, such as his tobacco box. I just couldn't stand that and told Than Ācān Mahā. He looked for a way to verify my report and established its accuracy. And so, he began the following speech, "The group acts as if there is nothing high, only low. I do not take it to heart and leave it to one whom they respect more to get them to prove themselves to be a blessing. I treat the group with indifference." It was only that much. But it was enough to chastise the monk in question.

Three people were involved in preparing the sleeping place at that time, namely Ācān Thõngkham, Ācān Wan and Khuṇ Sīhā. Khuṇ Sīhā was Ācān Wan's nephew. When Ācān Wan prepared the sleeping place, he would work together with Khuṇ Sīhā because they would hold the sheet at both ends to pull it taut. Then they

tucked it in along the edge to tighten it even more. Sometimes Ācān Thõngkham would secretly join in as well, but Luang Pū probably thought that only Ācān Wan and Khuṇ Sīhā did the covering. There was some secret overlapping, particularly in regard to this duty.

This raises the question: while the students were preparing the sleeping place, where was Luang Pū? Luang Pū was defecating in the toilet, usually after finishing his meal. If he defecated at the wrong time, it was said that the master's elements were not in order. While carrying out regular duties by day and by night, no one allowed Luang Pū to wait for his disciples. It was only the disciples who waited.

Back in the Nõng Phue period, unnoticed by Luang Pū, Phra Ācān Mahā taught the community time and time again. Even though this author here was present, if it hadn't been for Luang Pū Mahā as a guide, I probably wouldn't have been able to grasp the meaning of many of the occurrences. Many topics were so deep and hidden that I couldn't see through them. But when Venerable Ācān Mahā had the opportunity to give explanations unnoticed, it was as if turning upright that which had been overthrown.

As for the Venerable Ācān Mahā, he had to carry more responsibilities and concerns than others, but his faith and contentment made the burden lighter for him:

a) in the area of personal practice, because he had many rains as a monk, and also bore a great name as a "Mahā";
b) regarding Luang Pū, because he respected and loved him so much;
c) in serving the community in order to relieve Luang Pū;
d) in relation to the lay people, to convey Luang Pū's ideas to them in every respect.

Because I had grown closer to Luang Pū Mahā to the same degree that I had grown closer to the Great Phra Ācān, Luang Pū Mahā would often say to me, "If on any day you are pressed for time while waiting on Luang Pū Mun, you need not rinse my spittoon, you need not take my bowl to the sālā, instead see to it that you do your duties to Master Luang Pū quickly and in good time."

Venerable Ācān Mahā had probably considered that his role as group leader might lead to conflict because there were so many tasks for him to do. But he was wise and came out of his quarters in the morning before Luang Pū Mun. So, I had enough time to rinse the bamboo spittoon for him and take the bowl to the sālā for him. As for my own bowl, I had brought it down earlier, before dawn. All this had to be done in a fluid and brisk way to make it possible. The art of laziness, the art of midday naps, the art of fearing not being able to eat delicious food and a lot of it, and the fear of not being able to use good requisites – these didn't exist in those days.

At 7 pm: Meeting in Luang Pū Mun's kuṭi

Even if someone had fulfilled his duties in full towards the Khrū Bā Ācān or the community, but asked questions about meditation that made no sense, yes, even then there was another hefty sermon to be heard. In the first year, the author got to hear such a severe sermon three times, but each time for a different reason. In the second, third, fourth year, it wasn't exactly quiet either, and there were grounds for rebuke. But among practitioners it was the custom that even if a particular monk was the trigger, the whole monastery still had to listen to the sermon, because when you no longer have humility, arrogance and conceit get worse and worse because one no longer recognises oneself. But even when there was praise to be heard, it was like this – the whole monastery was praised. Whichever way, there was cause for humility, it made sense. If one did something wrong, there was the appropriate criticism and admonition, regardless of who it was. If one did something well, there was the appropriate praise. This is called anchoring humility in one's heart. This is how Luang Pū Mahā explained it at the time.

And so, the account continues. When Venerable Ācān had bathed, he would go out on the walking meditation path until dark. The monks and novices in the monastery did the same. At about 7 pm, everyone went to the master's kuṭi for the meeting. A small round lamp was lit. After bowing, everyone sat down sideways,[101] orderly and in silence. The Venerable Ācān chose a topic for a talk as he saw fit, some aspect in the sphere of sīla, samādhi, paññā.

Venerable Ācān's way of giving talks went to the hearts of those who delighted in the profound and in the Dhamma.

The Venerable Ācān spoke about ethics in a masterly way, going in order from the precepts laid down by the Buddha to the higher ethics, sometimes in brief, sometimes in detail with a hundred or thousand layers of meaning. He reduced it down to the essence of ethics, being fully in the present moment, together with concentration and wisdom, which have to be balanced at every level, right up to supramundane ethics, supramundane concentration, supramundane wisdom. Venerable Ācān's skilful means were profound, deep Dhamma. He took the life story of the Buddha, together with his male and female disciples, as a role model to stir the hearts of sons and daughters of good families[102] and to inspire unshakable confidence, going all the way to his own time as a young man wandering over hills and valleys: contentment, frugality, diligence, steadfastness, energy, devoting oneself to the practice in life and death, awakening the heart and mind, facing the danger in saṁsāra.

Danger, fire, defilements – these words have one and the same meaning, one and the same flavour. There is the fire of delusion and the fire of ignorance which make things burn and which have one and the same meaning. They are anchored in the nature of the khandhas of all beings. Getting caught up in worldly possessions and materialism affects one's will like addictive narcotics, until the Noble Path, the Noble Fruit, begin to manifest in one clearly and impressively. Then one will no longer circle around the edge of the winnowing pan with which one separates the wheat from the chaff, but rather will march contentedly right through the zero point in the middle. One crosses the split bamboo[103] [from which] the edge of the winnowing pan [is woven], namely the split bamboo of greed, hatred and delusion, across to the other shore. And if one isn't prepared to board the boat of *asubha practice** to cross the split bamboo, namely the skin that completely encases us, then it's hard to cross the ocean of lust, and it's hard to weaken lust. Whoever is full of lust is deceived by the skin, and they are like green wood that has been laying in the water. If you want to make fire with it, you may rub until your arms break off, but no fire will be kindled.

If someone is bent on banishing anger from their face, but doesn't fully set out on the path of mettā – equally for themselves and other beings – then the anger will just keep accumulating, into double anger, multiple anger, that cannot be relieved. One who has no mindfulness, who constantly forgets and goes astray, is a grand master and supremo in the instinctive nature of the khandhas, and then it is not enough for them to pay attention to the in- and out-breath. And then the forgetting and going astray compounds, doubles and multiplies.

The different types of meditation are all of real value, just like medicine for curing the different illnesses. If one uses a medicine that doesn't fit to the illness in question, then healing is difficult. This point has to be tackled by everyone individually, one has to find this out for oneself.

The meeting usually went from 7 pm to 10 pm. Sometimes we offered a massage afterwards. There was no talking and certainly no chatting. Sometimes the massage didn't last very long. Venerable Ācān would say when it was over and then we would accompany him to his room. He would then bow to the Buddha and meditate some more. Some days he would retire to his room more quickly, but getting up and washing his face at three o'clock remained as standard.

1946 and 1947, the meetings took place every three days in the dry season as well as in the rainy season. But in the dry season it wasn't totally sure, because monks often came to visit. In 1948, a meeting took place every seven days, and in 1949 every ten days or more because age was making itself felt. In the Nõng Phue period, Venerable Ācān provided the opportunity for a private talk. Those who didn't want one were specially summoned. The daily rhythm of these opportunities for a private talk: when the master came out of his lodgings in the morning he received his guests for five or six minutes, because it was almost time for the walking meditation before the alms round. After eating and going to the toilet, he received guests in his kuṭi for five or ten minutes. During the day, at one o'clock in the afternoon, he received guests for about twenty minutes. The master kept to his times very precisely.

Those who got a hefty dressing down

It is difficult to write one's own biography, or the biographies of Luang Pū, the Khrū Bā Ācāns and the friends from the Nõng Phue period in a somewhat systematic way because there were no tape recorders at that time, only what the one or the other had kept in their memory. Those who weren't interested didn't retain anything either, just enough to give them a reason for being there. But be that as it may, the Venerable Ācān's Dhamma talks, every single skilful means, every single story, whether general or for a particular person, with hundreds of thousands or millions of aspects, always emphasised that one shouldn't waste one's time in saṁsāra. They used to shake us up [to be made aware] that we have not taken ordination for fun, that we are not practising for fun, or to be dazzled by the world, or for worldly things, or just because of tradition, or just to get a different name.

One who goes to sleep as soon as it gets dark;
one who takes long noontime naps still in the light of day;
rising late he stays in bed each morning after three,
outwardly fulfils his tasks, but he deceives Ācān,
likes to boast of goodness, but he bickers with his friends;
one with cunning ways, who is inclining to deceit,
deep in speaking Dhamma only, shallow with his task;
one without respect and lacking in restraint,
feigning equanimity – as if of higher mind,
travels in seclusion, just for fun like a tourist –
one who's full of busyness, ready for practice not;
goes into the wilderness, earnest and resolute,
but as soon as he is finished setting up his camp,
hangs around with lay people, no time is left to strive;
when back in the monastery, brags to all his friends,
tells them just how great he is, how good the solitude …

… then all those I have listed here got a dressing down from Luang Pū and were not allowed to stay for the rains retreat, if not for one reason, then for another. Habitual troublemakers were not allowed to stay at the monastery with the Venerable Ācān in the first place. There are more points:

Many monks and novices just acting like machines,
whether making umbrellas, or busy dyeing robes,
for this purpose chopping jackfruit heartwood chips.
One who doesn't take advice, nor asks for the all clear,
thus completely disregards the master's own good ways;
He who shouts out to his friends across to huts next door,
likes to chat, but only touching matters of the world;
who likes hanging out with lay folk, seeking slimy gain;
Monk or novice, whom the master calls, and gives them work,
who, however, quickly passes on the job to other monks;
and another who, although he doesn't pass on work,
isn't there with all his heart, won't really lend a hand;
one who takes it all too lightly and with sloppiness,
grabs things at full pelt, and lacking mindfulness;
one when putting on the robe, when knocking the doormats,
standing close, next to the shrine and crowding other monks,
shaking robes, and banging, airing pillows – noisy, loud,
having washed his feet and then not fully rubbed them dry,
leaving footprints everywhere inside the hall;
one who after use does not return the tool,
someone else's or his own, not in the proper place,
treats so well own requisites and always with respect,
saṅgha property, not valued, cared for, or maintained;
one who doesn't sharpen his blunt tools after their use,
broken parts are not replaced and not repaired;
one who doesn't clean his dirty tools right after use,
after drying simply leaving them outside;
one who doesn't dry umbrellas after use,
or, who leaves them in the sun until they split apart,
stands them up, spread out, with one part in the dirt;
one who leaves muck in the dyeing shed,
does not clean the stoves, the place for firewood;
leaving water buckets open, does not close the lids;
one who fails to wash the doormats for a length of time …

… one of the likes of which I have listed here was given a salty, fiery thrashing by Luang Pū. There would be a lot more to add, but if I were to write it all down, it would become a kind of Pubbasikkhā or

Mahākhandha.[104] Anyone who wanted to live with the Venerable Ācān couldn't play the wise guy. He had to raise the white flag: "I, poor thing, am starting a new life."

When it came to accepting people into the *samnak**, the master was very cautious and chose with great clarity. Even if someone displayed humble and submissive behaviour outwardly, but inwardly was hard and stubborn, who thought himself equal or even superior to the master, then the Venerable Ācān wouldn't accept him, because he didn't want to take any risks. He possessed both the outer eye of the flesh and the inner eye of wisdom. If someone was suitable for receiving instructions and teachings, the Venerable Ācān would take him in. At that time, there was no one who could hold a candle to him.

Phra Ācān Net said to me, "My dear Lā, you have more potential than I do. You just come along and you can stay right away. I, on the other hand, circled around for three years before I could stay. Do you understand, Lā? The first year I was here, he gave me sermons in the style of 'My dear Net.' But his sermons didn't bring anything, so I fled into seclusion. Two or three times in succession I came and went. In the second year, preaching as before. Preaching in a very gentle way. That hurt tremendously. And so, I left again. Now I'm back in the third year and I'm having a really hard time. But I don't know when he will gently turn me out again." After these words he smiled.

No matter how many kuṭis were free, the master wouldn't accept anyone who couldn't be taught. First there were sermons to be heard, for three days, also for seven days, then he threw the person concerned out. The Venerable Ācān used the following words, "Oh yes, I have given you some first-class sermons. And now you will withdraw quickly into seclusion, got it? Don't stay here!" Some came here who didn't observe any customs, as if they had come straight from hell. These people were thrown out the hard way that same day. This happened often.

How Luang Pū Mun taught meditation

In the field of *bhāvanā**, meditation, he taught us to choose a method that suits our character and inclinations, that suits our own mind, that one feels comfortable with – one of the forty kammaṭṭhānas, whichever one we find practical. If one has practised one's meditation word sufficiently and looked sufficiently at one's meditation object, then they deepen, merging into a single flavour, for example, in the way of *khaṇikasamādhi**, where one is momentarily collected and absorbed, and then comes out again.

When one is collected and absorbed in upacārasamādhi, different nimittas may appear, such as a luminous moon, a radiant sun, a star, smoke, fire, a cloud, wisps of mist, a round disc, a lotus blossom, divine figures or one's own body. Phenomena manifest themselves, such as expanding or shrinking, floating in the air, travelling through space, all kinds of fascinating things. These were a few examples. All this is called upacārasamādhi – "cāra" means running after the nimittas, the guests who are stranded and hanging around. After [the subsiding of] the nimittas, one looks again as before – "*jhāna**" means to look. When the power of this upacārasamādhi is exhausted, one comes out of it again too.

In *appanāsamādhi** one enters an even more subtle state, but without nimittas, without guests stranded and hanging around. There is only the knowledge of the presence of the mind, without any wandering and without doubts like: "Well, does our mind have samādhi now or not?" In such a stage, by its very nature, there is no doubt. There is no manifestation of "there is the body". The only manifestation is merely "it knows". No thinking or pondering takes place. But when the power is exhausted, one also comes out. But it lasts longer than the upacārasamādhi because the inner realm is firmer, steadier and quieter.

This khaṇikasamādhi is also called *bhavaṅga**pāta[105] or khaṇikabhāvanā or also khaṇikajhāna. This upacārasamādhi is also called bhavaṅgacalana[106] or upacārabhāvanā or also upacārajhāna. This appanāsamādhi is also called bhavaṅgupaccheda[107] or appanābhāvanā or appanājhāna.

But even if these states are given various fancy names, the taste is one and the same. As far as the samādhi in the various stages is concerned, the taste is the same throughout. It's like tasting a small amount of curry with your tongue, then you only know a little of the taste. If you sample a lot, then you know it well. But he didn't teach us to just get stuck there, because samādhi at that stage is still subject to the power of the three characteristics, for example impermanence. But it is attributed as being on the side of the cause, on the side of the path. On the side of effect of cause & effect of the path it is all *puññābhisaṅkhāra*, higher meritorious formation.

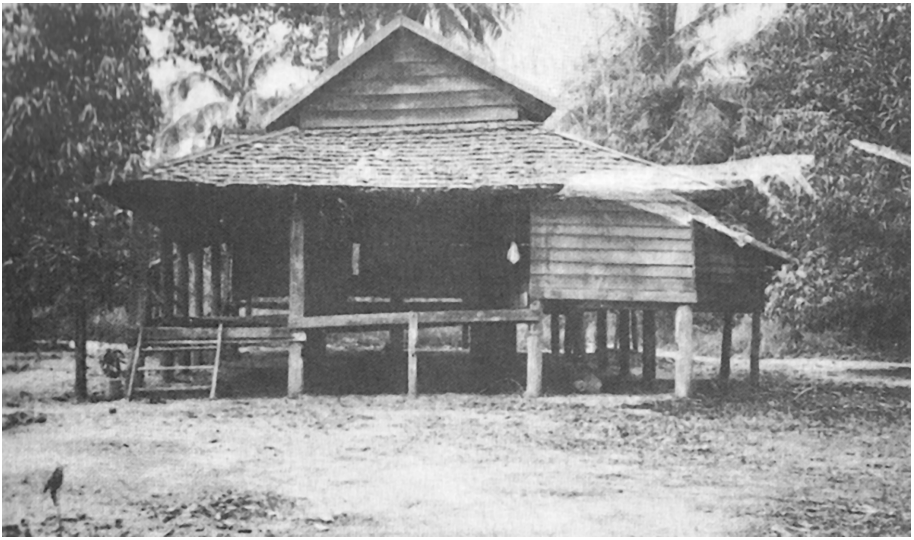
And how true is that, pray tell? True according to the conditions at the level of the respective stage. For example, skin is true at the level of its skin-ness, flesh is true at the level of its flesh-ness, sinews are true at the level of their sinew-ness, bones are true at the level of their bone-ness. For example. True according to a convention that distributes names and designations. True in the sense of absolute impartiality, namely that [something] arises, changes and decays. It fears and spares no one. With mindfulness and wisdom at this stage, one has to contemplate until it becomes really interesting, until knowledge deepens further in accordance with the truth of this stage, otherwise there is no chance for delusion to dissolve, because delusion is a top-level army commander of the kilesas, that has power over every kind of kilesa. Over all of them. Therefore, it is proclaimed as ignorance because it is not true knowledge, but rather a knowledge that sends one on a round trip through all kinds of suffering. It is the knowledge of the kilesa-māra because the kilesa-māra has power over māras of every kind. Over all of them.

I want to come back to the meditation methods. Luang Pū Mun emphasised that the forty kammaṭṭhāna divisions are the little siblings of *ānāpānassati**. Ānāpānassati is the pinnacle and crown of all the kammaṭṭhānas – which is not adopted and taught as a practice in the other religions outside Buddhism – because this method of meditation in itself fulfils all four foundations of mindfulness[108] at the same time. And it is a magnet with the power to draw in the other kammaṭṭhānas and assimilate them as vassals, for example, the venerable, infinite great qualities of Buddho, Dhammo, Saṅgho, sīlo, cāgo, kāyagatā,[109] old age, disease, death, form, feeling, percep-

tion, formations, consciousness. All these, for example. They are already inherently contained in every in-breath and out-breath and are true therein. The 84,000 *dhammakkhandhas** are by nature true, are by nature already contained in every in-breath and out-breath. No need to research them, look for them, write them down, memorise them, learn them by heart or whatever. If one no longer loses sight of the in-breath and the out-breath, then please, from which corner of the world should delusion, ignorance, the round of existence draw their power? If one loses sight of the in-breath and out-breath, one loses skin [as an object of contemplation] as well. If one doesn't forget skin, one doesn't forget the in-breath and the out-breath, as one and the same aspect.

When one contemplates the world, one contemplates suffering. When one contemplates suffering, one contemplates the world. When one contemplates formations, one contemplates suffering. When one contemplates suffering, one contemplates formations. When one escapes the world, one escapes suffering. When one escapes suffering, one escapes the world. When one escapes formations, one escapes suffering. When one escapes suffering, one escapes formations. All of this, without exception, has one and the same meaning.

If one knows present in-breath and out-breath, then one also knows the past and future in-breath and out-breath. If one knows the "knower" in the present, one also knows the "knower" in the past and future. And then one is no longer attached to the "knower" of these three times, has nothing to do with it. Such a person has extinguished the round in all three worlds within. Ignorance and formations, for example, are extinguished at the same point. The fires of greed, hatred and delusion are also extinguished at that very point. The army of Dhamma has power, which is kept in balance by mindfulness and wisdom. The armies of ignorance, craving and attachment, for example, are worn down and must crumble. No need for long speeches. The sun shines in full splendour, the darkness cannot assert itself, gives the order to retreat, disappears at once, right there.



The eating sālā was grass-covered, with a floor of split bamboo, about four metres by five metres. Spittoons and water containers were made of thick bamboo cane. When the food was divided up, the spittoons had to be put away neatly beforehand. They could only be put into place after the food had been divided because the bamboo floor swayed and wobbled so much. Walking around would have caused the spittoons to tip over.

Time out (1946/47)

A heart that doesn't cling to the one who knows as its cause – a heart beyond all causes needs no searching. That very heart truly travels no further. A heart that is purely Dhamma, purely beyond all causes, free from any category by which another heart might find it – that heart has transcended the world, is without trace.

Phra Ācān Fan Ācāro

Time out

Phra Ācān Mahā goes into seclusion

When November came in that year 1946, Phra Ācān Mahā Bua thought about going into seclusion. Venerable Ācān Mahā's project was to be not too far away so that he could receive information about Luang Pū's weal and woe in all aspects, so that he could come and go at any time without having to make a big fuss about it. And he hoped to reach further, particular attainments in the Dhamma, for which he could then receive further instruction, because he had already reached a higher monastic "age" with fifteen rains retreats behind him. But he would miss Luang Pū and was also afraid that the people in the samnak would be left on their own afterwards in their dealings with Luang Pū, and that they wouldn't make it befitting for Luang Pū in all aspects of the Dhamma. But in the end, he struggled through it and made up his mind to go.

For my part, I toyed with the idea of accompanying Venerable Ācān Mahā Bua. Luang Pū already knew that. And Luang Pū often preached, "Whoever goes into seclusion this year and, when questioned on his return, has nothing substantial to show in the sphere of meditation, I won't let him stay with me in future. Anyone who really goes into seclusion must, when I ask, have real successes to show for it, and no small amount. But most of them just go from samnak to samnak like tourists on a pleasure trip."

Going into seclusion at that time meant to go into the jungle, into the forest, onto hills, onto islands, onto mountains, nothing else, because there were no problems[110] on the political level. All that was required was courage and fearlessness in the face of tigers and various other forest animals. Going alone was considered first class. To go in twos was second class. To go in threes was third class. It was better to stay in the monastery than to go with more

people than that because the prevailing opinion was that tourism leads nowhere.

The question is whether Luang Pū Mun feared that Phra Ācān Mahā Bua also wanted to go on a pleasure trip or not when he spoke like this. The answer is that, on the contrary, he only spoke like this for other groups, for other people, because in that year many groups had wanted to go into seclusion.

Two or three days later, Than Ācān Mahā went to Luang Pū Mun and said to him with veneration, "Yours respectfully, I am thinking of going into seclusion, in one form or another. If there is still any work where I am needed to provide guidance, I will continue to guide the community until it is done, so that I can then leave. If there is any other necessary work to be done, I will wait." Luang Pū replied, "We have already finished the robe season. We have enough firewood too. But restoring the kuṭis, repairing the roofs and collecting firewood, this we will do in February. If you want to go in the period until then, then go ahead."

Phra Ācān Mahā asked, "If I go, then on what day should I go? And in which direction will I find sufficient seclusion?" Luang Pū replied, "Go whenever it suits you. And if you go east, you will find good places with sufficient seclusion, na!" Then Phra Ācān Mahā bowed and went back to his kuṭi, but a decision on the departure day hadn't yet been taken. He had only wanted to talk to Luang Pū and leave the decision to him. On the day of departure, he expressly wanted to go and bow one more time to say goodbye.

I have noticed that it is deep Dhamma when true disciples of a teacher take leave of their Ācān in order to go into seclusion. It is the way of seeking advice that honours the teacher, attaches an importance to him that is full of respect, and where decisions aren't automatically made according to one's own discretion – an exemplary model in the practice tradition. There is no offence, no overshooting the mark, no boasting. The Ācān is a learned person, the disciple is a wise person. Nowadays this is hard to find because the students have usually already decided everything for themselves. Saying goodbye becomes merely a phrase, and sometimes with downright shameless behaviour towards the Ācān. When they

leave, they don't even come once more to say goodbye. They behave like hungry ghosts or demons.

When I reflect on it, I find it very sad. Luang Pū Mun died just over 30 years ago – and how far the practice tradition of today has drifted away from how it was then! Not to mention from the time of the Buddha! Only so and so far, but it makes such a difference. Dhammavinaya is still as it has always been, it's more the practitioners who are fading. But that is one of the issues that are inconceivable. If one thinks about it anyway, one only gets confused. So that's enough talk. It should just be a small comparison.

My humble self also wants to go

Continuing on with the subject of travel. About three days after Phra Ācān Mahā had visited Luang Pū Mun for a talk, Phra Ācān Mahā said goodbye to him and got ready to leave. I had also prepared everything and then asked Than Ācān Mahā, "Should I say goodbye to Luang Pū or not?" Phra Ācān Mahā replied, "If only I say goodbye, then only I have behaved properly, but not you, because this is a matter for each individual." The more I was able to see the Dhamma in Phra Ācān Mahā, the more impressed I was. So, we went up together to take our leave. Venerable Luang Pū displayed a gentle and kind demeanour that was full of mettā. When we had said goodbye, we got ready for the journey.

We walked from the monastery in an easterly direction. Partly we followed footpaths, partly cart tracks, through a succession of forest and jungle areas, interrupted only by small rice fields. We went straight to Wat Pā Bān Phra Kham Phū. This was an abandoned monastery in a forest of tall teng and rang trees. By this time of year, it was slowly turning cold. I asked for nissaya from Phra Ācān Mahā.

He gave me the chance to [hear] an impressive teaching, "So now we have gone into seclusion, far away from the Khrū Bā Ācān. If we engage in the practice as we do in the monastery, it won't do justice to the word seclusion because staying in a monastery is the norm for the broader masses. There must always be some work and

fiddling around there, sometimes this, sometimes that. If you are only two, as we are, then you have to reduce the khõ wat in order to have time to meditate for longer periods without interruption. Please bring water here for rinsing the bowl and for me to bathe, and provide me with a filled barrel. Please scoop drinking water and fill it into the kettle and drinking water vessel for me. The washing of my bowl will be taken care of by the layman who accompanies us [after the alms round]. And I will dry it and put it in the bowl cover so that you can take it straight away to be aired and stored. I will bathe myself, sweep the accommodation and prepare the sleeping place myself. Our lodgings are a reasonable distance apart, that is, the grass-roofed kuṭis with walls of banana leaves and a floor of fāk, narrow but big enough for the mosquito net. The woodworms have pierced and riddled the fāk floor and the banana leaf walls with holes, and I want you to fully commit to the practice, all right? Don't talk to me if it isn't necessary, but don't take this to mean that I have anything against you. On the alms round, I don't want you to take my bowl for me, as you've been having bouts of fever for the last three or four days, and this has been chronic for you since the middle of the rains retreat."

And so, we stayed there for almost a month. Water for drinking and general use was scooped out of a stream. They had dammed it about three rope lengths from the monastery. I carried it over, but at four o'clock in the morning it was still pitch black. I didn't light a lamp because there weren't any lanterns. He made me apply myself fully, without stopping, without slackening, no matter if it was day or night.

I usually had an episode of fever around noon or one o'clock in the afternoon, which subsided after an hour, but was accompanied by a severe headache. But I could eat, could carry on and was not particularly weakened. This happened once every two or three days, but at night the fever hardly came at all. One day Phra Ācān Mahā gave me sugar-coated quinine to take. I took six tablets at once. My ears were closed all day, and I didn't eat anything, so that the medicine could take effect. I treated the fever like this for fifteen days, but it remained as it was. I still fetched water and swept the monastery. I took the fever with me to the walking meditation.

There are fevers of this kind too. But if it's a fever with vomiting and a rash, it can also kill you.

When we had been practising there for almost a month, Phra Ācān Mahā moved deeper into the forest with me, about 500 metres from the old camp. I fetched the water from the old place. The alms round led to Bān Phra Kham Phū as before. They made small huts for us, with a floor made of thin logs, wide enough for the klods. I was about two rope lengths away from Phra Ācān Mahā, but kamma struck again. They had used thin round logs for the floor in place of fāk. Among them were two or three sticks of nāmkliang wood. After spending three or four nights there, my face swelled so much that I could hardly see out of my eyes. Phra Ācān Mahā laughed and said, "The uglier you become, the more your farts stink." Then he examined my hut and discovered the two or three sticks of nāmkliang wood.[111] They had used it to cover the lying area, mixed together with other kinds of wood. So, we had the laymen remove these pieces and replace them with others.

When I reflected on it, it was clear to me that they hadn't meant to tease me. After all, it was autumn and [without leaves] they couldn't tell what kind of wood it was. They saw that it was nice and round and smooth, so they used it. Besides, they had to work quickly. They weren't up to anything. When I moved in, my mosquito net was wet, my klod was wet. I dried them on the spot. Such is the circling in saṁsāra from birth to birth, from existence to existence.

In the sphere of meditation, Ācān breath was the anchor. Whether collected or not, it was equally suitable. Whether I was dealing with small problems or large problems, dwelling on high or low things, I held on to this very breath as an anchor. When I contemplated other things, I saw that they were not as palatable as Venerable Phra Ācān breath. The only exception was with walking meditation. Here I used another object as an anchor, that is, I focused attention on the movement of the legs when walking. But when lying or sitting, the breath had to be the anchor. When I contemplated anything at the same time as the breathing in and out, I had the impression that it became clear to me internally and that I

didn't have any doubts either. As for other people, things may become clear and evident by some other method, it depends on the person. There is nothing to be said against it. If it was a matter of *samatha**, I used the breath as an anchor. If it was about *vipassanā**, I used the breath as an anchor. If it was about liberation or not about liberation, I took the breath as an anchor. No matter when, I took the breath as an anchor. The choice of skilful means is up to each individual. But this was the skilful means of the Venerable Bunthan.[112] As to whether it is difficult or easy, opinions differ.

There are also differences in regard to patience; in some it is strong, in others it is limp. When saddhā/confidence, *viriya**/energy, *sati**/mindfulness, samādhi/concentration and paññā/wisdom, when all five come into balance and equilibrium with each other at the right time in the present moment, then they become Dhamma, a heart that has power and strength beyond measure. One who contemplates Dhamma all round makes progress. The opposite is one who lapses and goes backwards.

One who delights in the world is stuck in misery. One who delights in Dhamma will pull out of misery. Whoever sees the danger of the round of existence, whoever no longer trusts the round of existence, is a key-holder to the gate of Nibbāna. A heart that doesn't cling to the one who knows as its cause – a heart beyond all causes needs no searching. That very heart truly travels no further. A heart that is purely Dhamma, purely beyond all causes, free from any category by which another heart might find it – that heart has transcended the world, is without trace.

But a heart that doesn't know itself only encounters danger. The further it travels, the more nothing but danger – millionfold, incalculable. And it doesn't encounter well-being.

Farewell to Than Ācān Mahā

After I had been with Phra Ācān Mahā for about two months, the bouts of fever were still returning and still rebelling, not really subsiding. In the way of old, they used to say: Father's fever, which bugs grandfather; melon fever with cool body, where one can eat;

betel nut fever with hot body, where one can eat in the evening; fever of midday sleep; in the second half of the day, at three o'clock in the afternoon one wants to eat samõ and makhām põm; lay-about's fever: washing, dyeing and drying becomes difficult to the point of odour nuisance.[113] Since this was the case, I found it necessary to leave Venerable Ācān Mahā to practise in separate places.

Venerable Phra Ācān Mahā approved and shared the same opinion. Then he laughed and recommended that I go to the fields in the direction of Sakon Nakhõn. I should hang my klod and mosquito net up in the middle of a field. I should practise walking meditation in the sunshine. Maybe the heap of elements would like the fresh air. After these words he laughed again. I couldn't hold back and joined in the laughter. Confronted with the words from Venerable Ācān Mahā's sermon, I was greatly amused. They were expressions of profound principles that invited contemplation, reflection and went straight to the heart. That's why I was able to remember them well and have not forgotten them. Whatever Venerable Ācān Mahā said was usually a skilful means for conveying principles of practice to the listener. He really didn't speak according to the principles of the world. [His speech] had a grace and a profoundness in its essence.

There was his half-scathing, half-joking manner. If the listener had joined in this teasing in a loose-mouthed way, he would have been knocked to the ground by an elbow blow from which, on the count of ten, he wouldn't have been able to scramble back up again.

Another way was careful and straightforward. You couldn't go a millimetre against it because everything was presented so carefully and so straightforwardly.

The intimidating way of making a scene – you had to keep quiet and listen to everything respectfully. At that point, it wasn't possible to appeal or defend oneself. One had to correct one's behaviour in private. The Venerable Ācān Mahā had to be able to determine for himself whether his sharp and severe sermon had had any effect. He had to be in a position to ascertain this over a period of several days. But of course, stupid people think that he wouldn't notice anything.

The comforting, gentle, kind way has two uses. In one case there is no hope, [the teacher] is at his wits' end. If he wasn't gentle and kind, [the pupil] would only have the reprimand in his mind; that would be demeritorious [for him]. But the relationship is cut off, [the teacher] is no longer willing to teach him any further. With the other gentle, kind way, further instruction will take place.

The "tight" way of treatment as an ongoing condition: we have to act as if we don't care that he puts reins on us. We continue to behave well if the corrective measure can permeate our being.

The way of indifferent treatment, saying nothing, but not tight, not serious – in this way we improve ourselves until we are completely corrected.

With my own ears, I have heard Luang Pū Mun say during a talk, "If you have a hundred students, you need a hundred methods because their characters are different."

Back to the topic. I wanted to go to another place to be in seclusion, as befits someone who is chronically ill with fever. After the alms round and meal, the Venerable Ācān Mahā wrote me an accompanying letter[114] with the following address on the envelope: "To Than Mahā Phān, Bān Phohn Ngām, Study Monastery." The contents of the letter read:

"Dear Than Mahā Phān, the bearer of this letter has moved from Luang Pū Mun's samnak into seclusion. Currently, he has to stay in seclusion in a village area when possible and hopes to return to Luang Pū Mun's samnak. Therefore, please arrange for some lay people to prepare lodgings for him, that in terms of their location would seem to be sufficiently secluded.

With the expression of respect, Bua P."

I received the letter from Phra Ācān Mahā, bowed in farewell and set off. Venerable Ācān Mahā sent a layman along to accompany me, but after about a rope length I told him to turn back because I already knew the way from the time I had been in search of Luang Pū during the dry season of the previous year. I went alone, following a route through the forest, and arrived at the Venerable Mahā Phān's monastery at midday.

Oh dear! Now I must apologise to the reader for an omission, namely:

When I left Phra Ācān Mahā Bua, I implored him, "If Phra Ācān should return to Luang Pū Mun before me, please tell Luang Pū, 'Khuṇ Lā left me out of consideration for me, because he was having a bout of fever every four or five days and wanted, for life or death, to go all out for the Buddha's teaching.' Or whatever Phra Ācān thinks is true and appropriate, as he sees fit. I just wanted to have that said." Phra Ācān inquired, "What benefit do you see in me sharing this with Luang Pū?" I replied to Phra Ācān Mahā, "I'm afraid Luang Pū will give me a clout on the head: 'So Khuṇ Lā went into seclusion with Khuṇ Mahā, but then separated from Khuṇ Mahā because he didn't want to be subordinate to Khuṇ Mahā. He is just too stubborn. I won't let Khuṇ Lā stay with me anymore.' Well, that's possible." Phra Ācān smiled and said, "Yes, what you say makes sense. I will report this to Luang Pū exactly as you have truthfully stated it."

Now, I will continue the story with my arrival in Bān Phohn Ngām. When I arrived, I respectfully handed the letter to Than Ācān Mahā Phān. When he had finished reading, he told his father, a lay follower, to quickly make [my request] known to the lay community. And thirty people came together. Because it was past noon, they hurriedly agreed that they would take me to the grove of the quail balls, where there were sinister demons, in order to stay and to practise Dhamma. If you strayed there, you would see the balls, that is, the quail nests, and then there would be a cawing "kaek kaek" sound. There were particularly threatening demons in that grove. Then they built me a *kratõp** with a roof and walls of straw. There was an outhouse complete with a pee trough. The path for walking meditation was finished the same day. There was even water from a well. It was about a kilometre to the village, well, maybe not quite, just a little over twenty rope lengths. It was a deciduous forest with very tall, dense teng and rang trees. The alms round was favourable, I was able to do it quite comfortably. The people were pleasant. As for the bouts of fever, well, I was fever-free for two or three days, then it came again, but I could eat enough. It was just the headaches that didn't go away. The people wanted to come and

check on me on the days when I had fever, but I wouldn't let them come. They wanted to come every day and grate medicine for me, but I wouldn't let them come. When the fever came, then I just had a fever alone. I only let them bring me a grating stone and medicinal roots. I could do the grating myself.

Mahā Phān, seventh level Pāli scholar, was Dhammayut, disciple of Than Cao Khuṇ Debkavī, Wat Bodhisomphõn, Udõn Thānī. We had the same upajjhāya. He was just visiting his home village. It was an abandoned monastery. He was staying there with a boy, his nephew, and was very generous. He had his father come here in the morning for company. After the meal, he returned home.

As a precaution he said to me, "On the day when we hold our Uposatha for the proclamation of purity, I will come down to you because I would also like to have a little seclusion. You don't need to come in specially to see me. I will seek you out myself." When the day came, he did indeed turn up. He was not a bit conceited about himself or anything else. Rather, he was thinking about building a fence around the monastery, with wooden posts that he would saw to size himself.

In the sphere of meditation, the in and out breath was still the anchor. Some days I sent out mettā, coupled with breathing in and breathing out. I bowed to the Dhamma, which knows no enmity and no danger. In the sphere of the mind, fear didn't arise, and I could exercise control over the heart.

After I had been there for about four days, two tigers, a pair, came into their village. They came from the east, following the mountain range. They took turns roaring as they walked along the mountain range directly towards the village. Always around 11 pm, five days in a row. But when they reached the edge of the village, the noise stopped and there was silence. No one knew where they had gone. And at about three in the morning, they would roar again in turns, heading out from the end of the village, along the route they had come. They roared confidently, not timidly or fearfully, about ten rope lengths from where I was camped. The roar was further away on their way in, about twenty rope lengths, but came

closer each time. On the way out, however, the roar was further away each time.

When they came to me in the morning to collect the rice that was left over from my meal, they said to me, "We people from the village are worried. We have never heard anything like this before. They are just too brave, they both roar with such confidence when they come in. They also take turns on their way straight into the village. Perhaps it's because of the Venerable One's presence that the spirits are worried. And that's why they demonstrate such fateful miracles, to scare us. Well, that could be it."

I replied, "Now, pay close attention and listen carefully to what I am going to explain to you. And that is: At present we are in the cold season, and this year it is bitterly cold, worse than in other years. The water is almost frozen. When I unwrap the curries that you lay people have wrapped up and put in my bowl to eat, they have turned into clumps of jelly. In a year when it gets bitterly cold, the tigers roam. In ancient Īsān it was said, 'When in a year there is plenty of good rain, the tigers roar and roam about.' The elements of the tigers like the cold, and so do the elements of cats. These are not ghosts nor mythical creatures nor any other kind of fate bearing beings. And the elders stressed, 'When tigers roar and roam, next year's rain will be good.' And last year the rain was good too, wasn't it? And another thing. It's quite normal for all beings, that when the heart roams, this roaming shows itself outwardly too, if not by one mode of expression, then by another, as the case may be. But we humans have many ways of expressing ourselves – some whistle, some gesticulate, some dance, for example."

After I had explained it to them in that way, I watched them. And it had an effect. And so, all the villagers stopped being interested in roaring tigers. That's the language of animals. They have a mouth, so they roar. That's all.

The wicked tiger is the tiger of delusion

After humble contemplation of the personal situation within, the tiger of the defilements builds its house, its city, around the city of the mind, the city of the heart. Only the path and fruit of arahantship are of the kind that can tame, conquer and pacify it. As long as there is birth and existence of some kind or other, there will also be the tiger, the lion, the snake, or some other form of danger. Delusion alone is the commander who makes us wander in saṁsāra. The tiger of delusion is a tiger that is particularly wicked, lurking in the nature of the khandhas. Only genuine *vipassanāpaññāñāṇa*, genuine knowledge through insight-wisdom can drive it out, chase it away, make it flee. Genuine concentration by itself is merely like a sandfly or a mosquito that wants to bite it. But it lies comfortably under a mosquito net and doesn't tremble in the slightest. Wisdom and right view, sammādiṭṭhi, are the magnet of the factors of the path. When sammādiṭṭhi, which is the first factor, already sees correctly, when it becomes the magnet that draws in intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration, when these are within arm's reach of it, then we no longer have to doubt or drift off onto another path; for they are one and the same telephone connection. When we say that it is the presider over path and fruit, that's not wrong, because in their essence, path and fruit are connected, like skin and flesh, because [the path] brings forth the fruit without choosing a period or point in time for it. Whether mindfulness and wisdom grasp it or not, it doesn't matter: it is true as it is. Truth doesn't evaporate, either in relation to cause or to effect.

Those who have doubts in relation to path and fruit will find it difficult to practise Dhamma. Cause and effect: the plant and its fruit, kamma and its consequences, cause and its effect, conduct and its result – they all have one and the same meaning. But whether one takes a good path or bad path, at whatever level, depends on path, cause, plant, kamma and conduct. Intention is the yardstick there. Whether one knows oneself or not is not the problem – that is the domain of the wise, of those having special knowledge. For the eye of wisdom of a truly wise person sees without error. Even if

they make a mistake, there is a door for them to rectify it. One cannot count up to ten before they rise again.

So genuine Dhamma, subtle Dhamma, isn't dependent on the realms of speculation. A genuinely wise person will thus naturally have respect for the Dhamma, and not be half-hearted and lukewarm about it. And so, they won't claim that Dhamma is them, or that they are Dhamma because they recoil at being put on an equal level with Dhamma. They always honour Dhamma as something higher, higher than themselves. Even the First and Highest Teacher had respect for the Dhamma. He didn't put himself on the same level as the Dhamma. Only according to the custom of the language does it say: he recognised Dhamma, he organised Dhamma, he classified Dhamma. If Dhamma had not existed before him, how could he have recognised it? How could he have organised it? How could he have classified it? This point is worth reflecting on. Otherwise, one might come to think of oneself as being Dhamma, of Dhamma being oneself. One would put oneself on a level with Dhamma, one would put Dhamma on a level with oneself. One could never overcome conceit, arrogance. Ignorance, craving, grasping, kamma would scoff, split their sides with laughter.

These things are topics where one has to go inwards, teach oneself, teach one's own heart. If one thinks one has the responsibility to go outwards and only teach other people, then one lacks mettā for oneself. If one lacks mettā for oneself, how should one be able to have mettā for others? If we don't have any financial means, where should we be able to pay for something? When we borrow in order to be able to pay, the interest grows over our heads, overwhelms us, and multiplies until we can no longer keep up.

Let us turn to the subject of staying in seclusion, in particular in a place that wasn't a fully equipped samnak as far as daily necessities were concerned, where one had to make frugality the main thing, for example, with washing and dyeing[115] the robes. To soak and wash the robes, I had to use a small bowl. An ordinary earthen pot had to be used as a container for boiling the jackfruit heartwood chips. But there was no shortage of firewood. Wherever I went to gather it, there was enough. There was no shortage of

water either. At that time there was poverty, but only in terms of consumer goods. When boiling the jackfruit heartwood chips, I had to boil quite a few pots full. One pot was only enough for one saṅghāṭi. I had to boil several times before I was finished with one round of washing and dyeing.

But it was wonderfully lonely and secluded, I had nothing to do with people. There was no question of hot drinks in the afternoon. Toothpaste was simply the little tooth-cleaning stick made from broadly beaten kothā wood. I got up in the morning in the dark at three o'clock, washed my face, rinsed my mouth, wiped my mouth, rinsed my teeth, put water in my mouth, cleaned my teeth with a finger, that was it. There was no question of toothpaste from a tube or tooth powder.

I took my saṅghāṭi as a blanket against the cold. It was a question of warm or not warm, and with the upper robe alone it was simply hopeless.[116] The bathing cloth, the bed sheet and the pillowcase were one and the same piece of cloth. I had to sweep at three in the afternoon. I hurried to finish, then quickly bathed and quickly went to the path for walking meditation. Even the towel for the face and body was identical to the bathing cloth and the cloth for drying the bowl.

Life as a forest monk

At that time, lay people sought out monks and had a real need for the Dhamma of the wholesome and for the fruits of merit. There was no pretence or hypocrisy, no vices, no *apāyamukha**. Those who had vices in mind didn't dare to approach monks. Nowadays, there is plenty of this, even among the leaders in a samnak's circle of supporters, until their livers burst. But there are also those who are set on path, fruit and Nibbāna, devoted to them – both laymen and *samaṇas** intermixed together – so that it is enough for a continuation, so that it is enough to get some air. And yet the whole world is becoming a fiery pit of coals.

Hindrances are a magic potion, they are the essence of cause and effect; they ensure that all the wise do not doubt the statement:

The worlds, whether past, future or present, are an aid and support to disenchantment, to turning away, to letting go, to liberation from the delusion and the wrong understanding of those who have been deluded and have misunderstood for a long, long time. Intention, mindfulness and wisdom then naturally incline to the Deathless Dhamma, resting in it, bowing down to it. Confidence then believes things that are to be believed, wisdom knows things that are to be known, for example, that formations are enormous suffering. For example. Confidence and wisdom, when they meet here, join forces and become companions, together with energy, mindfulness and concentration. The rope that ties us, binds us, constricts us, hems us in, the rope of being deluded, dull and dumb, snaps with a bang. Then there is no more bondage. This Dhamma is the real thing, the Dhamma of the Noble Truths on the side of the Noble Path, and of the Noble Truth of the end of suffering. This is not the topic of a worldling who is still stuck deep in the defilements of the heart.

While I was staying at Bān Phohn Ngām, in that forest dense with undergrowth, they came to place *paṁsukūla** in their own way. After respectfully accepting it, according to the etiquette of the paṁsukūla as a heap,[117] I gave them a very brief blessing. Then I gave them an explanation so that they could understand the significance [of the process]:

"I have respectfully accepted [your gifts] and will respectfully pass them on. I want you lay people to joyfully agree to this opportunity of a doubly meritorious action. For I will offer [these gifts] to Phra Ācān Mahā Phān in your monastery. I will keep only a few of the wax candles and three boxes of matches for myself. But I don't want to boast about my frugality here, because the real reason is that, according to Luang Pū Mun and Ācān Mahā Bua, my various cloth requisites are already complete, and because [further cloth requisites] would only get into a mess while travelling.

As far as the donation of money is concerned, I don't have any wishes that could be fulfilled by it. We are a village community here in the forest, having no means and no special amenities. Uphill, downstream, coming and going, here one has to traipse on foot until one reaches the various villages; and it is time-consuming. So,

this donation of money should contribute to the construction of the monastery fence for Phra Ācān Mahā Phān. This with all due respect, my dear lay supporters."

After we had talked about this matter, which was reasonable anyway, they had no further questions. It was polite and straightforward. And then I continued to stay there in seclusion. The days went by until 28 of them had passed. It was approaching a full month. So, I left Than Ācān Mahā Phān and the lay community to head for Phraves Cave. They didn't want to let me go so easily because they wanted the demons that haunted the area at that time to disappear completely first.

I replied, "While I have been here, I haven't seen them once. Nor have I seen that the quail's nest of demons [actually] exists. And I have stayed here long enough that the kratõp [built] by you lay people has been worth the effort. It is time for me to retreat to a cave, for I long for a cave.

So, I wish that the wholesome fruits of merit which the lay community has already created, whether in previous lives or in this one, and will continue to create, may continue to flourish until the complete ending of suffering, according to your wishes."

They really behaved as well as they should. They gave me alms food wrapped up and neatly in the bowl. There was no need for anyone to carry anything to the monastery as "later food".[118] But it was oh so far, so occasionally someone did run after me.

I ate everything all together [out of the bowl], sweet as well as savoury. Because I lived alone, I was able to further economise on the monastic duties, as the conditions that might cause me to fear that something could get out of hand were no longer there. I was content with my situation and it cost me no effort. It really ran by itself for me.

There is the following custom among the high-minded people of the world: when they see a monk who goes alone into seclusion, they will consider and check whether he is really practising Dhamma or is only after worldly gain. When one goes alone, one has to take many aspects in the practice into consideration; other-

wise, one would give others the opportunity to criticise the practice tradition. It's true that blame is a worldly subject, but for things that are beyond our abilities, we also face the blame. Otherwise, we would completely take off and there would really be no controlling authority at all. The sons and daughters from good families who set out in our footsteps would then have nothing to hold up as an example. They would become students who have no further teacher. That is, they learn nothing from the father, nothing from the teacher. Anyone who is heedless towards parents, towards the Khrū Bā Ācāns, is an ungrateful person. For such a person the days until they degenerate and turn bad are numbered, and each time they set like the moon on the night of the new moon. Therefore, all this is a matter to reflect upon.

The fully awakened Buddha is not a tree stump religion founder or a tree stump meditation teacher.[119] He instructed and taught comprehensively in every aspect. It is the Buddha's teaching that is complete and perfect in every aspect from the ground up, surpassing every other religious teaching in this world and the next, and also in the past world and the present. And there is absolutely no other teaching that could ever be equal to it or comparable to it.

In writing these lines, however, I am not taking sides on behalf of my own interests, I am taking sides for the Dhamma. But those who are anchored in the Dhamma will know, appreciate, honour and love it. We can practise and respect the Buddha's teaching because the teaching of the Buddha, the teaching of the Dhamma, the teaching of the Saṅgha, moves us to embed this in the heart, and probe in the heart for that which is so profound that there is no way to fathom it. The outer earth before us with 240,000 *yojanas** is still in the realm of being measurable. For the qualities of Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, which we call the qualities of the Buddha's teaching, there is no yardstick to be found.

If we reduce this to the "one who knows", no matter how much or little one knows, if one understands well, understands correctly, understands the escape from the defilements of the heart, then this too is beyond measure. It isn't within the realm of possibility to use the measuring cup of worldly convention. The world of definitions

comes to measure and evaluate and can split a zero from the edge to the middle.

Let's return to my departure from the resting place in the Bān Phohn Ngām Forest. I handed over everything they had given me to use. After the morning meal, I prepared for my departure and then set off in an easterly direction following the mountain range. They accompanied me until the formalities had been fulfilled, for I had already taken this route once before in the dry season of the previous year when I had been on my way to Luang Pū Mun.

Meeting with Phra Ācān Fan

To be honest, on that day of departure I had another bout of fever, but I didn't tell them about it because I was afraid they would react emotionally. As soon as they turned around, I focused on walking in meditation along the mountain range. The striped barbet birds were singing their song, the leaves were falling so [the trees] had gaps in their tops. I wasn't worried, and devoted my attention to my legs as I walked forward in meditation. With both fever and meditation, I walked along the slope. The nightjars were singing loudly and their echoes could be heard from far away. I was able to walk until after five in the evening, by which time I had reached the Bān Nā Nok Khao area. There I met an eminent master, namely Phra Ācān Fan[120] from Wat Pā Dhātu Nā Wehng. He was on his way with three or four monks to Phā Daen Cave. There were two soldiers accompanying him.

He asked, "Hey, where are you going? Who is with the Great Phra Ācān now? Why did you run away from there and head off on other paths?" I knelt down, raised my hands in añjali and gave him the basic gist. And so, he said, "Yes, you've been on the road all day, even though the fever hasn't subsided. I understand your situation completely. So, first rest in Wat Dhātu Nā Wehng, okay? There are no monks there at the moment. I'll send these two soldiers right away to accompany you. I can get from here to Phā Daen Cave with just the monks. My dear soldiers, please tell Corporal Amphõn to-

morrow to give the monk an injection, will you? When you are well again, you can then go back into seclusion."

By then it was already late evening and twilight was descending towards the horizon. The two soldiers took the requisites from me. One of them hung the bowl around his neck, the other shouldered the klod and also carried the water kettle. I bowed on the ground to Venerable Ācān Fan, then we turned our backs on each other and the two groups went their separate ways, the master heading south with his monks and me heading north with the soldiers. I also had another bout of fever. The distance was about ten kilometres and we took a direct shortcut, a path as wide as a mouse track. We had no light. It was so dark that we couldn't see where we were placing our feet. I relied on my merit, relied on my kamma, and then developed loving-kindness while walking because I feared stepping on a snake. When we arrived at Dhātu Nā Wehng, it was almost 9 pm. The soldiers dropped me off at a kuṭi and then they too went to their accommodation for the night. Around 10 pm. the fever subsided a little, the head still hurt, but it was only mildly noticeable.

That day I meditated lying down, I just couldn't sit any more, but I didn't fall asleep right away. At dawn I looked at the water for general use and the water for drinking. [The containers] were still full. I swept the monastery grounds around the kuṭi and when it was time, I went to collect alms food. While returning from the alms round, the lay follower Bai accompanied me and brought eleven tablets of medicine. He conveyed Corporal Amphõn's message that I should take two tablets twice a day, either before or after eating. After I had been there for six or seven days, the fever had finally disappeared. I felt very light and unburdened and regained my strength very quickly. The food agreed with me and I could taste it again, even though I had only taken eight or nine of the eleven tablets. The doctor's plan had been that if after taking all the tablets I hadn't recovered, he would have given me an injection. Taking the tablets at the same time as having the injection would have been too strong.

I stayed there for a total of eleven days. I noticed that the heap of elements had become much stronger and at the same time hadn't

had a single bout of fever. And so, I said goodbye to the lay people, "I want to bid you farewell and leave for Phraves Cave." Layman Bai protested, "He has only just been nursed back to health, and he's doing a runner!"

Laughing, I replied, "I am one who wants to go to Luang Pū Mun. The master has emphatically preached that anyone who returns from seclusion and, when questioned about meditation, has not achieved anything substantial, will be chased away with a clout on the head and won't be allowed to stay for the rains retreat because he has just been hanging around for the fun of it. And Phra Ācān Fan has also said that I should go further into seclusion as soon as I have recovered from the fever. This is how it is, my dear lay devotees. I will retreat alone to caves, to mountains, to forests and thickets. That is how I earn merit, and you lay followers too. So, we benefit in two ways. If Luang Pū Mun were to learn that I had retreated to a monastery just for fun, it would make him wonder whether I had carelessly turned away from the khõ wat of the Khrū Bā Ācāns, whether I might not take the practice seriously in both life and death. Although I had been forged by the master, I wouldn't have taken his instruction to heart. My onward path would have been cut off." The lay people replied, "Yes, if that is so, you are welcome to go. Please send us some mettā."

When the next day came, I set off after the meal, reached Bān Khohk at dusk, spent the night in a forest monastery, and continued my journey after the meal. At dusk I reached the district village of Nā Kae, but continued on. Out of necessity, I spent the night in one of their rice fields, right on time at 9 pm. There was no water for bathing, nor for drinking or washing my feet. It became bitterly cold during the night. I only covered my upper body with the robes and didn't wrap them around my feet because I hadn't washed them. I just accepted the cold. When it was time in the morning, I didn't have any water to wash my face or rinse my mouth. I rubbed my eyes with my hand and then went in to Bān Dū for alms. After I had eaten, I continued on to Wat Pā Õm Kaeo Dhātu Phanom. I rested for two nights and then went on to Wat Pā Mueang We. I was there for one night and then continued on, staying in a very old, ancient monastery, an abandoned monastery. They said that ghosts

had been haunting the place one night. Alms round at dawn and then on after the meal. I stayed one night at Wat Pā Bān Nõng Hāng. Continued on in the morning after the meal.

I rested in Bān Nā Sohk and learned that *Luang Tā** Ming had already gone to stay in Phraves Cave. The lay people from Bān Nā Sohk accompanied me in search of [another] cave. And Phra Ācān Son went too, in order to seek out a cave as well. As planned, we reached Makhuea Cave as dusk was approaching. From Makhuea Cave to the cave where Phra Ācān Son wanted to go, it was about forty rope lengths. As agreed, we first wanted and needed to rest in the Makhuea Cave. And then we made an arrangement that the following morning we would go on a shortened alms round to a forest thicket about a kilometre away from where we were staying. The lay people wanted to meet us there to give us alms food in our bowls. After we had discussed this, Phra Ācān Son went to his cave. The lay people returned to their village and would probably have arrived there around 8 pm. We, however, remained all alone, each to his own.

I didn't have a campfire, nor candles, but I did have impermanence and all the suffering of the physical realm. Yet, this heart really remained in balance in those moments, without happiness and without any suffering at all. I didn't hang up the klod. The ground was as sloping as a termite mound. Sitting wasn't possible, my head would have tilted towards the ground. As the ground was so stony, from the time of Kakusandho[121] till today, I don't think there will be any monk or novice who would be crazy enough to meditate there. Sarcastic thoughts came up in me. I was at my wits' end and spread out my bathing cloth as a sheet. That day, once more, I hadn't taken a bath. I spread the cloth out on the sloping ground, lay down with my head facing south[122] and used the bundled saṅghāṭi[123] as a support. I couldn't put the bowl down and had to tie it to a tree. I put the klod and its cover in a bush because I hadn't hung it up. While lying down, I used my right elbow as a lever and focused my attention completely on my breath.

It turned out that I couldn't sleep at all; I was wide awake until dawn. I must have made a very special kind of picture. Whenever I

see it in my memory, I have to laugh my head off. And it is a means of increasing disenchantment in saṁsāra without losing sight of Dhamma. It becomes a perception of the past, a realisation in relation to the past that goes to the heart. It can undoubtedly be a testimony in relation to the present and the future.

Past and future are vassals of the present

People who don't see clearly for themselves the mass of suffering in the present, past and future must bring [the three times] clearly onto the same level for themselves, then they may be able to reduce the delight in saṁsāra. As long as the delight in saṁsāra is not diminished, the craving, the wanting, is also not diminished. The suffering in the heart is also not diminished. The journey on the path of wisdom, of developing the heart, of insight, has no traction. The Dhamma of cessation, which extinguishes craving, which extinguishes suffering in the heart, doesn't stand out clearly. It is like a person with poor eyesight who may be travelling by a vehicle or ship but cannot see anything properly.

Within the field of the Buddha's teaching, it cannot be said that the past and the future themselves are of no particular value. Useful things from the past can be used as examples on the right path. From the useless, one can learn a lesson as to what is to be avoided. Even with good intentions for the future, we prepare and preserve the useful – and the useless we avoid. For example, when we walk, even if we haven't yet taken a step, we need to see in advance where we are going, where we are stepping. Those who practice Dhamma in order to escape delusion, false, intoxicating understanding, but who don't quickly and on the spot draw on past and future as witnesses for the sake of illumination in the present – even if they were to have the tendency and disposition for dry insight, it's of no use – they must first complete the threefold knowledge of insight: *atītaṁsañāṇa*, knowledge in regard to the past; *anāgataṁsañāṇa*, knowledge in regard to the future; *paccuppannaṁsañāṇa*, knowledge in regard to the present.

To give an example, if one clearly sees the three characteristics in the present, then the three characteristics in the past and future join in as witnesses on that same level. If there are two independent [concurring] witness statements, it is not a case of false testimony. The present decides this and at the same time comes in as another internal witness. Whether one takes a good path or a bad one, a worldly path or a supramundane path, the past and the future are, by their very nature, wholly vassals of the present. This, however, doesn't apply to the arahant, because an arahant is not attached to the three times, has nothing to do with them. Even if the arahant takes all three times and uses them, they do so without being attached to them. Water lands on a lotus leaf, but it doesn't stick to the lotus leaf, so that it ends up dripping off the lotus leaf. The water doesn't worry about the lotus leaf. The lotus leaf doesn't claim to be heavily burdened because water has landed on it. Nor does it claim to be relieved when the water finally drips off it.

Let us return to a question that is still hanging in the air. The question is: Past and future – isn't it just the present that is shouting and calling and beckoning? That's right, but it expands, makes a total of three sermon pulpits out of itself, which refer to each other and follow in each other's footsteps.

I am not of the opinion that this is a difficult or depressing matter. And I am of the opinion that the sermon prompts us to listen without expectation, and also without any judgments in the external world.

If the present has frayed into the stories of the old ego – past, future – then awareness must be able to cope with the fraying, must be there in time. Then it turns into a small, insignificant matter that can be chewed up – in time, with ease, swiftly.

The cave of self-mortification

Now, let's return to the report of the next stage of the journey. In the morning, when it was time, I came out of the Makhuea Cave, the cave of torment and self-mortification. In order to lie down, I had to ram my right elbow into the ground and leaned on it until the morning. I walked to meet Phra Ācān Son for the alms round. After the meal, when the bowl was washed and everything was done, I let him know:

"The cave I stayed in last night could be called the cave of despair because when after nightfall it was time to lie down, I could only do so by using my elbow as a lever for the whole night. I was wide awake and couldn't sleep. When lying down, I concentrated on my breath, on breathing in and out, and at the same time on my elbow, which I used to support myself on the ground. Despite this, I still could laugh to keep the suffering from the bruises at bay. Now I am longing for Phā Daen Cave, because last year in the dry season, I had spent a night there before going on to Luang Pū Mun. I had already recognised the place as being conducive in every respect This year, when I walked past it and, by passing it, had met Phra Ācān Fan close to Bān Nā Nok Khao, he had said he was going to Phā Daen Cave. But by now he will probably have returned to Wat Pā Dhātu Nā Wehng because it's quite possible that they contacted him from Sakon Nakhõn. Or, if this isn't the case, he has probably already moved on to another cave. That's also quite possible, because he had two or three monks accompanying him. As far as I could see last year in the dry season, Phā Daen Cave is, in my estimation, really well suited as a place for a single monk to stay. The alms round route covers a distance of one hundred rope lengths to the district of the provincial capital of Sakon Nakhõn. From the town itself to the cave, it is no more than four hundred rope lengths. So, I am going to say goodbye today."

Venerable Ācān Son gave his blessing to everything. But first I had to head back to Wat Pā Bān Nā Sohk because there was no path along the ridge that went along the whole length of the mountain range, and there was only one path along the foothills of the range.

Meeting Phra Ācān Fan in the Bān Phai Cave

I bowed to Venerable Ācān Son in farewell and then descended down from the mountain, together with the lay people who had come to meet us on the mountain to give alms. When I reached the bottom I was already very close to Wat Pā Bān Nā Sohk and so I didn't enter the monastery to rest. I asked Chālī, a lay follower, to accompany me as far as the path along the foothills of the mountain range, which ran due west. The layman accompanied me for about a kilometre, far enough so that I wouldn't get lost, and then I had him turn back.

So, I walked alone and at ease along the edge of the range. Without concern, I enjoyed meditating on the legs as they strode along. I was completely with the Dhamma; the parikamma connected with and touched the process of walking and kept the rhythm. There was no shortage of time to be alone and just for myself. Occasionally the crickets joined in singing as I walked along the trees. I met a child catching crickets and asked, "Is this the right way, little one?" He raised his hand, pointed out the direction and told me that it was important that Luang Phõ should stay on the path as before. This was the very path that led past Bān Nā Sī. I walked until nightfall and spent the night near Bān Khõ, got up early, went for alms, had the meal, and continued the journey. I rested for two nights in an abandoned monastery near the village of Bān Nā Sī Nuan.

Back then, the two-year long task of building Wat Dõi Dhammacedī[124] had just begun. I departed from Bān Nā Sī Nuan and took a path over the mountains. At three o'clock in the afternoon I arrived at Wat Pā Bān Tao Ngõy. The next day I left and walked to Bān Phai after the meal, arriving there in the middle of the day to learn that Phra Ācān Fan had been staying in Bān Phai Cave for several days. He had moved on from Phā Daen Cave. They said that the Venerable Ācān Fan came down to this Bān Phai alone every day for the alms round. The rest of his group had already returned to the monastery. Hearing them talk like this, I thought to myself that it would not be in accordance with Dhamma if I were to simply move on to Phā Daen Cave. That I should go and see the Venerable Ācān. They beat me to it and said, "To visit Venerable Ācān, it's a

distance of seventy rope lengths from this village up to where he is." – "Yes, I want to go up to see Phra Ācān Fan." After these words, they accompanied me for a little more than more than two rope lengths along the path; then I told them that they could turn back. After walking for a decent amount of time, I arrived at the cave where Venerable Ācān Fan was staying.

At that time, the Venerable Ācān was weaving a bucket for scooping water with his own hands. I put my bowl down in an appropriate place, put my robe on diagonally, with one shoulder uncovered, and went to the Venerable Ācān Fan to bow to him. He greeted me with the words, "Where have you come from?"

I informed him, "I have come from Makhuea Cave. I had intended to go to Phraves Cave, but Luang Tā Ming was already there, so I went in search of [another] cave and ended up at Makhuea Cave. After nightfall, when it was almost time, I wanted to lie down. The ground for lying down was very sloped there and the place was altogether unsuitable. I only lay there for one night and from there I came here." Venerable Ācān Fan said, "Yes, I moved here from Phā Daen Cave a long time ago. All of Than Kwā's group have already returned to the monastery. If you want to stay here with me, I have no objections at all. Think about whether that suits you."

I bowed to Venerable Ācān Fan and then looked for a place to camp, and found a wonderful slab of rock. I didn't hang up the klod and the mosquito net at all, and just lay the sheet out on the rock slab. Once again, I went without water and didn't bathe that day because I was worried that the Venerable Ācān might run out if I did.

Greeted by a swarm of bees at Daen Cliff

When, after getting up in the morning, it was time, I went on alms round with Venerable Ācān Fan. There was a male layperson who received Venerable Ācān's alms bowl and offered his services. So, after the meal, he took the leftover rice home with him. During the night it had been quite cold and I had been shivering as a result. After the meal, the bowls were washed.

After drying up, I politely told Venerable Ācān Fan, "That Phra Ācān has given me the opportunity to stay with him is a majestic blessing for me, but by character I am a real scaredy-cat. I want to cut off this trait. If I went to Phā Daen Cave alone, would Phra Ācān consider it suitable or not? And I have another problem; and that is that Luang Pū Mun declared this year that anyone who goes into seclusion and, when questioned on his return about meditation, has not achieved anything substantial, will not be allowed to spend the rains retreat with him. This point weighs heavily on me. It is as if I carry heaven and earth on my shoulders. I have yet to find a solution, it is not yet at the point where I can cast off the burden."

The Venerable Ācān lowered his gaze for a while. Then he said, "What you are telling me touches my heart. I appreciate it and approve of it. Put it to good use, will you? Raise the red flag of resistance!" And then he went on to say, "So off you go, pack your bags! I will instruct this layman here to accompany you as far as Phā Daen Cave. You will go along a path on the ridge. There's no need to descend to the path at the foot of the mountains."

I bowed three times and headed off. I let the layman go ahead because the path was not easy to see. He wanted to carry my bowl, but I didn't let him because I was afraid it would be too heavy for him. So, I divided up the bundle of cloth and let him carry some of it. We walked in meditation in silence. At about four o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at Phā Daen Cave. And then I hurriedly told the layman to return to his village, but he would probably spend the night in Bān Nā Kap Kae or even in Bān Lao Nok Yūng because he had to follow the ridge due east. As soon as the layman had turned back home, I prepared to climb up to the cave.

It turned out that there was a swarm of bees swarming about. Thousands of them were buzzing around me in groups, but they didn't come into contact with me. They flew very slowly. My body was encircled above, in the middle and below. It could not be claimed that my heart was gripped by a fear of the bees. Nor could it be claimed that it was particularly brave and courageous. I stood there and considered: "Hey, it has never occurred to me, even in my

dreams, to establish a kammic bond of enmity with anyone. So why this [spectacle] here?"

No sooner had I finished the thought, the entire swarm of bees flew up the rock face and disappeared into their nest. And then the background became clear to me. When I had arrived here, I hadn't looked up and seen their nest. But when I saw them fly into their nest, I knew that they had flown out of that nest. The nest had a hundred bulges and protrusions, some of which were frayed and full of holes. The reason they had all flown back like that without stinging me might have been because of my contemplation on the Dhamma, that I had not come in enmity or as a danger to anyone. This is quite possible. It may be that their stream of consciousness was soothed, their anger tempered. But I don't know their states of mind, it's just a notion that makes sense. But it's not a particularly strange occurrence, nor of any great importance. I am only writing it down as a review of suffering that passed by on the journey of the formations, in the accumulation of the pāramis, surrendering to the practice.

It was getting late. I took my water kettle to scoop up some water. I quickly swept a little bit so that the khõ wat was fulfilled. Then it started to get dark. In the cave there was a tiny hut, a kratõp, a cubit from the rock wall, with a floor of thin logs covered with galangal leaves. It had walls made of wild galangal leaves and was big enough for me to move around in. The upper end was a roof made of natural rock. My head pointed towards a precipice, facing the north. The path for walking meditation was about four arm spans long and ran due east.[125]

My bed sheet and my bathing cloth were one and the same piece of cloth. It also had to be used to dry the bowl, and as a pillowcase, and as a towel for the body and face too. The light conditions were dependent on how much the sun, moon and stars were contributing. To see or not to see is a matter for the eyes, they are responsible for visual contact. I didn't need to put up the mosquito net or the klod.[126] The pillow was my bundled saṅghāṭi.

There was no question of there being a bucket for scooping water. I used my water kettle as a scoop, both for water for general use

and for drinking water. To wash my feet, I sat down on the plank bed in my den and let my feet hang down. With one hand I grasped the soles of my feet while facing towards the south.[127] Then I tensed my body and lifted my foot off the ground. With my right hand I grabbed my cup and poured water [over the foot]. With my left hand I took hold of the foot and washed it. Half a cup was sufficient for each side. After washing, I leaned back on my arms, shifted my body weight to my buttocks and lifted both legs at the same time. With the soles of my feet in the air, I took a piece of cloth to dry myself.[128] Then I turned my body and lifted my legs up onto the plank bed. Otherwise, the feet would have again probed the earth and rocky ground with their tread. Although I wore sandals, I still had to wash my feet, because wearing sandals was only good against some kinds of thorns and on uneven paths with sharp stones and rough ground; it didn't help to stop the feet turning black. Taking care of the feet, not leaving them dirty, is also prescribed in the Vinaya.

During the time I was there, I walked for one hundred rope lengths for alms. I climbed along the ridge for about a kilometre, then turned towards the foothills into a marshy area before eventually coming down by the rice paddies near the village. On the way back, I left the village and ate at a tiny rice field. Right at this spot, there was water available from a well. There was a layman named Ācān Sehn who followed me to keep me company. After eating, I washed the bowl properly then hung it over my shoulder for the climb up the mountain. On some days, I skipped the meal and told this layman beforehand so that they wouldn't have to wait in vain for me on the days I didn't go for alms.

At that time, there was a fearsome water buffalo with long, curved horns. He had already taken a whole lot of people by the horns, and even chased and butted his owner. One day I came across him on the way, just before entering the village. He blocked the way and absolutely refused to let me pass. He swung his horns, only about six or seven arm spans away from me. He was a bull, about thirty years old by human standards. Imposing he was too, fat he was too, tall he was too.

We both stood there and watched each other for about ten minutes. No matter how I tried to shoo him off, he just didn't want to get out of the way. No matter how much I tried to coax him, he just wouldn't listen. He just swung his horns and showed what he was capable of. Finally, he returned behind his gate. Relieved, I quickly followed him, sneaking glances back and forth as I went, and eventually passed him undisturbed.

The villagers found out what had happened. They went to the animal's owner and told him to wait until later in the day before letting it run about. They complained and moaned about it, telling him to sell it for slaughter, but he just wouldn't sell it. This water buffalo had, after all, been causing problems in the village and the surrounding countryside for a long time. A group of people from the village had gone out into the fresh air to cast their fishing nets in the middle of the rice fields and had almost been killed. But fortunately, they had been quick enough to climb a tree. The nets had already been cast, and the animal had torn them to pieces and shredded them under the tree, so that not a single piece was left intact. It had chased its owner into a sugar cane field, back and forth and around in circles, from morning to noon. The owner had noticed that the sugar cane plants were quite high, the size of an arm span, and so he had plunged in there until there was enough time to make a quick getaway. This monk could count himself lucky that nothing had happened to him. They complained loudly in this way. But subsequently, he did indeed let the buffalo run about later in the day, allowing unimpeded passage during the time of day when monks go on alms round.

When I reflect on anger, delusion and greed, which are in the nature of the khandhas of all beings, they differ only in their degree of severity. As long as the defilements are present in all beings – in devas, māras, brahmas and human beings – then, as a consequence, there is also the path to their alleviation, the path to rooting them out, to liberation from them, in devas, māras, brahmas and human beings. And so, the Blessed One, knowing the Dhamma, could assert, *"Ariyadhamme ṭhito naro."* The noble Dhamma, which is so exquisite, must exist, must be anchored in humanity. If people know and truly accept that these defilements are in them, if they don't

resist recognising the disadvantages in the defilements, then they will probably also not resist banishing the defilements out of the nature of the khandhas, or at least trying to do so. Then, by nature, respect and willingness to submit to the Buddha's teaching is already present within. If there were no defilements in all three world spheres, there would be no Nibbāna in this very Nibbāna.

Poverty is the wealth of the thudong monk

Staying all alone, having nothing to do with the crowd, became the cradle of contemplation of the Dhamma. The heart had acquired a taste for Dhamma at an ever-higher level. Whichever kind of meditation I engaged in, I could see that it was a relief for the heart. I didn't have to force it. It absorbed it on its own. Mindfulness and the wisdom of the heart were firmly and intimately anchored within. To use cattle and buffalo as a comparison: the effort to herd them into the stable was not necessary. When it was time to go inwards, it went in of its own accord. When it was time to go outwards, it knew its limits. Body and mind were unburdened and relieved, not dull and confused. What I had previously known, seen and practised came out ever more clearly, distinctly and palatably in the heart.

Anyone who doesn't enjoy seclusion, has never tasted the taste of seclusion, only the taste of confusion. Seclusion of the body, seclusion of the heart, seclusion from all acquisitions: they came together and became one and the same state, One seclusion, *eka-viveka.*[129]

Whether it is written that way or not does not really pose a difficult problem. That which is written serves as a map. But endowed with flesh and authenticity, the essence merges, comes in of its own accord, strives for the One seclusion in the present. It condenses on its own, no need at all to herd it along with "Giddy-up, giddy-up!", as with cattle and buffalo. People who hope to escape the suffering in saṁsāra, truly and swiftly, must talk about this openly, convey it to each other correctly, shake each other up, make

it possible for everyone. Otherwise, they go in exactly the opposite direction.

Dhamma is a deep matter, but however deep it is, it deepens in the heart. When it becomes superficial, it becomes shallow in the heart. It's not that deep or shallow are to be found in the earth, in the sky, in space, in external wind, fire or water. Those who possess mindfulness and wisdom stay with the heart, dig down to the heart, to the Dhamma, don't deviate from the Dhamma, from the heart. They cannot deviate from the Dhamma, from the heart. When they seek, they seek in the heart, in the Dhamma, in the Dhamma, in the heart. When recognizing, they recognize in the heart, in the Dhamma, in the Dhamma, in the heart, again and again like this.

During my stay practising in Phā Daen Cave, I had to wash and dye my robes with cold water. Wherever there were small pools in the rock slabs the size of a salad bowl, that's where I did the washing and dyeing. It wasn't difficult to scrape off some of the red rock there, and it wasn't a nuisance at all.

I didn't have to worry about hot drinks, Khām Põm or Samõ, and I didn't have to open my mouth in anticipation of them. In my shoulder bag I didn't have any medicine against fever, against colds, against the poison of animals that bite and sting, nor did I have any in my bowl bag. And I wasn't interested in getting any either. Even matches and wax candles had been missing for a long time.

In the event of a snake bite, I only had urine, faeces and earth[130] as antidotes. It wasn't even worth hoping for ash as an additional ingredient. Urine, faeces and earth mixed together and ingested – if it helped, it helped. If not, I was ready to die alone in meditation. I wanted devas to visit me then in order to bring them to be moved by the Dhamma, as a cause for increasingly wholesome states in [the heaven realms of] the sense sphere. On the subject of disposing of the corpse, I had no doubts at all: in the worst case, I would leave that to my lay attendants. But I counted on the better alternative of flies and masses of maggots, of crows, vultures, foxes and jackals.

Contentment with practising Dhamma, with the aim of escaping the dhammas of the defilements – the good old states of being

deluded, dull and dumb – completely defeats the contentment with a Dhamma practice that is aimed towards any material things in the world. The heart and intention of the respective person have an influence on the ego, and then they have it under their control. They drive wrong view out, cut it off, fling it out, in such a way that it can no longer rise up against them. This is called victory without return, surrender on the spot. There is simply the determination to press forward on the path of meditation.

And while I was staying there, on the seventh to the eighth and on the fourteenth to the fifteenth day of each half-month, on both the waxing and waning moon, they came to stay in another cave and observe the [eight] precepts, about six rope lengths from where I was camped, six to seven people in number. They prepared Khāo Lām in peeled bamboo tubes,[131] which they put in my bowl.

On those days, I went on alms round to a slab of rock about four rope lengths from my resting place; I didn't go as far as the village. Having my alms meal on that rock slab really touched my heart. Just Khāo Lām with nothing else, but a blessing to chew and swallow. The heart was clearly aware at the moment of putting it in the mouth, clearly aware at the moment of chewing, clearly aware at the moment of swallowing, clearly aware at the moment the food entered the stomach. Lightness in body and mind, happy. As if I was eating in the middle of open space, as if I was consuming food of the devas and gods. Saturated in Dhamma with body and mind. A victory over a material, worldly sense of being full and satisfied. Far away from heaven and earth. In the sky, there are still clouds to be seen, fog, sun, moon and stars as symbols of some sort of meaning. The heart was even further away from that. Oh, dear heavenly state! If I say little about it, it will not reveal what it was really like. If I say much about it, it will be said that I claim superhuman states. But this rapture in body and mind was still on a lower level. The rapture in body and mind of a liberated person knows no comparison.

If the writer, the listeners, the readers want to know the truth of this assertion, then they must first comprehend it for themselves, up to the point of total liberation from the defilements of the heart.

When one knows it for oneself, there is no more need for talking and bickering, for disputing and debating with others and making a problem of it that divides the world. The problems that beings have can come to an end when arahantship is attained. Everyone below this is still a slave to their own problems, but these problems can be divided into two groups: problems of a worldly nature and problems of a supramundane nature. (This does not in any way apply to the arahant, because an arahant is no longer weighed down by problems.)

I want to say some more about the lay devotees who came up to put Khāo Lām in my alms bowl on the mountain. Those lay devotees said to me, "This Khambong water cave, which is a dark cave[132] where the most venerable one has bathed and taken water for general use and for drinking in the past – has on some days, in broad daylight, wild cats that go in there to drink. Sometimes tigers, sometimes leopards, sometimes panthers. Sometimes bears or wild boars come. Not to mention what goes on at night. And there are giant snakes that leave trails, two hand spans wide, that come in and out and live there. And last but not least, the cave where the most venerable one practices walking meditation and spends the night – there are big pythons with a trail one hand span wide."

I replied, "Oh yes, it doesn't matter whether I'm afraid or how much I'm afraid. It was and remains my duty to devote myself in life and death to Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. The heart surrenders to the kamma of past lives and its consequences. And it's hardly possible for those things to reconstitute themselves and start all over again because every day and every night I set aside time to radiate out mettā." [133]

With a confidence in the Buddha's teaching, that is largely under the guidance of wisdom, even if fear jumps out of our face for a few mind-moments, the noble qualities of confidence, mindfulness and wisdom will be able to banish the fear. Fear has to take a back seat and not play too much of a role in the heart. The same goes for laziness and fickleness. If the dangers of greed, hatred and delusion of the past are implanted and ingrained in the nature of the khandhas, and have not yet been diminished, overcome, made to disap-

pear, then enmity is multiplied, danger is multiplied without end. The dangers of old age, sickness, death, become followers in a multitude of ways, become vassals of the dangers of greed, hatred and delusion.

But when one has escaped the dangers of the defilements completely, the dangers that follow in their wake, the dangers of old age, sickness, death no longer have any malignancy because one no longer looks back to see if they will be rekindled. It is like an empty, abandoned, uninhabited building – there is no jealous owner in that building. If these things have been contemplated beforehand, [the realisation] is unlikely to fade, for the task is to follow the path of the heart until arrival.

Otherwise, practising Dhamma for the sake of Dhamma, for the sake of the heart, for the sake of escape, for the sake of freedom, will not enlighten the mind. Then it cannot become a practice with Dhamma as the highest authority. Then it becomes a practice with the ego as the highest authority, which determines according to the automatisms of one's own defilements. One makes the world the highest authority and sails on, following the world, in one direction.

Encounter with young wild boars

Back to the story. So, they said there were lots of tigers, snakes and whatnot. But in the course of my stay, I didn't encounter any, I didn't see any. What they had told me didn't trouble me at all. I only saw a single wild boar when I was walking along the mountain ridge in the morning for alms round. Before coming to the place of the encounter, the path made a bend like the elbow of a bent arm. I walked in meditation, fully aware of each step my legs took, and that is how I came across the wild boar, standing in front of me, facing me directly, about two metres away. That boar was about a metre tall. I had just placed my left foot on the ground and wasn't yet ready to lift my right foot – then I saw the boar standing there facing me and blinking. The pig wasn't startled, nor was the human. We both stood there and looked at each other for about five

seconds. I quickly contemplated: "Well, it's about to run away because something just came into its mind." No sooner had I finished this thought when it rumbled off and ran very close to my right side with light steps. Three or four young piglets rushed after their mother. I hadn't seen her piglets before then, only the mother.

And the thought arose in me: "If a meditator, with uninterrupted mindfulness of body and mind, who dwells with the legs during the process of walking, is suddenly confronted with something frightening, they are not frightened, because mindfulness and clear comprehension are very much with the body and mind and haven't been diverted to the outside. In such a way, the development of concentration is balanced with mindfulness and clear comprehension, as well as wisdom." (It is not a tree stump!)

Jhāna means to look. Samādhi, concentration, means to be steadfast when looking. Sati, mindfulness, means being able to be present while looking. Sampajañña, clear comprehension, means to be aware of oneself while looking. Paññā, wisdom, means to know comprehensively while looking. The balancing [of these factors] takes place in one and the same moment, and not one after the other in different moments.[134]

A person who is easily startled doesn't have mindfulness and clear comprehension with them in such a moment because they have directed them heavily towards the outside. They are too slow to come back to themselves, to go inwards with their mindfulness and clear comprehension, they are not in time at the moment of being startled. It feeds on them like a flea, and when it becomes too intense, they can apply an antidote. They apply a balm. What is this balm? One turns to the breath, turns it towards a good outcome – or simply to calmness of mind, samatha, in some form, or to insight, vipassanā, in some form.

But the people of the world like to speak of sickness of the mind, sickness of the heart. Is there sickness of mind and sickness of heart in the remnant of the kammic fruit of the khandhas in an arahant or not? Or, if it can be said that the kammic remnants belong to the heap of formations that has already lost its essence,[135] then maybe it's possible. And I would like to know: is fright a real

formation? Or is it connected with delusion? That delusion is just this: our good old craving. Is that true or not? Is someone who has escaped craving one who is still frightened or not?

In the Dhajagga Sutta,[136] which talks about the subject of the arahant, it says: *"Abhīru acchambī anutrāsī apalāyī'ti.* He is free from fear, free from fright, free from having his hair stand on end and being horrified." If these words are true, then someone who is not yet an arahant has a means at hand to test an arahant. Those who cannot recognise real gold, but have a device at hand to test gold, can determine if it is gold with their testing device.

Now, let's talk about a different subject. During my stay, one night around midnight, the in and out breaths became finer and finer. Clear knowledge arose: Aha, for one who is already liberated, there is no front and back, as with the out and in of this breath. Aha, for one who is still struggling and striving, who wants to experience liberation, there is also no front and back, as with the out and in of this breath. Aha, for one who dwells free of want by day and night, there is likewise no front and back, as with the out and in of this breath. Aha, for one who is of the opinion that there is no good and evil, there is also no front and back, as with the out and in of this breath.

When I contemplated this, the knowing was present at the same time as the out and in of the breath. There was no before and no after. And pīti arose, in a way that was totally overwhelming. I exclaimed, "Now that's really hitting the mark with right view!" Then I rebuked myself, "Going nuts, huh?" I answered back, "If I'm aware that I might be going crazy, then I might as well prevent it."

But I didn't think that anything extraordinary was happening at that moment. It was merely pīti, which consisted of the Dhamma of right view. Body and mind were light and at ease. It seemed as if I could ram and push through the mountain, but I didn't succumb to the temptation to ram it. If I had tried, I would have broken my neck or crushed my skull. Pīti, this fullness in body and mind, is possible in many and varied ways. But in any case, it arises and passes away, it cannot escape impermanence.

Those who have distanced themselves from the three characteristics in their meditation practice invite delusion to themselves, and to no small degree, because pride and conceit are defilements of the heart that are difficult to uproot; for they lie deep in the nature of the khandhas, embedded at a subtle level. They are a deep-lying, subtle sediment. If you dry out the water [over them], so that it evaporates, you can see a lot of this sediment – if you dry out the water gently, not by shaking the bottle and pouring it out.

One morning I went down for the alms round and told the lay people, "If nothing comes up, tomorrow I will make my way back to Luang Pū Mun because I miss Venerable Luang Pū Mun very much. I will come down for the alms round and eat at the abandoned monastery near your village." They said, "Why is it so easy for you to leave?" – "Oh, I have been here for a month, too long, it is about time. I have to hurry so that I can be there to help with the work – collecting firewood and whatever else that needs to be done here and there. We have to collect firewood several times a year."

When I had finished eating, I climbed back up the mountain. Looking at the place where I had stayed, I was overcome by the pain of separation. I realised that I was attached to this place because my state of mind there had at times brought forth pīti and feeling moved by Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. That led to wet eyes quite a few times. I absorbed it to the same measure as I did in Phraves Cave.

So, in the morning, when it was time, I went down. I didn't have many requisites and hadn't taken anything that had belonged to them up with me. Mat, pillow – I just used my bathing cloth and the bundled saṅghāṭi. I hadn't borrowed a bucket from them either. My kettle was just the bucket. The bucket was just my water kettle.

When I arrived at the abandoned monastery, they took the klod and mosquito net from me and deposited them in the monastery. I went on alms round and then returned for the meal. They followed me and sent some more food to the abandoned monastery – about five, six people. After the meal, I gave them the precepts and a blessing. I arranged and packed my things in front of them, and they took full advantage of the opportunity to watch. I explained to

them, "This is the monk's identity document, this is the clothesline, this is the razor, this is the sharpening stone for the blade, this is the water filter, this is the *Pāṭimokkha** book, this is the mosquito net, this is the klod, this is the knife for cutting one's nails, this is the knife for carving tooth wood, and that was it."

Why had I explained this to them? Because they had been watching with such interest. Because they might have suspected that I had found a small Buddha statue in the cave and taken it with me, or valuable treasures in the soil and in the water. I feared that this might damage the lineage of the Khrū Bā Ācāns and wanted to bring them to drop their suspicions. If they had spread stories that were not true, they would have brought harm upon themselves. And then I took leave of them.

They accompanied me for about seven or eight rope lengths, then I had them turn back because I had decided to stop first at Wat Pā Suddhāvās to wash the robes. At that time, Mahā Phaibūn was staying there all alone. When I entered the monastery, I put on my upper robe diagonally with my right shoulder uncovered. My sandals had long been worn to shreds and so it wasn't difficult to take them off. I put my requisites down in the sālā and went up to bow before the Venerable Mahā Phaibūn. He asked some questions of me, and when he had got the gist, he said, "Oh, that's good timing. You could look after the monastery for me for a bit. I want to go to the casting of the Bān Khõ Buddha statue. When I get back, you can move on. Or if you don't want to leave, we can stay together."

I replied, "I cannot stay, my dear Than Ācān Mahā because I am in a great hurry. I would like to stay here for just three nights to wash my robes. And then I must go as quickly as possible to the Great Phra Ācān Mun to spend the next rains retreat with him. If I take care of this monastery and Ācān Mahā only comes back after a long time, then it will be difficult for me. For it is not possible to say with certainty how many days the journey to the Buddha statue casting will take. If Than Ācān Mahā has someone to look after the monastery, he will be relieved, and every now and then a letter will arrive for me saying, 'I am being held up in such and such a matter.' And then I would be at my wit's end. This with all due respect."

After these words he laughed and said, "Your wisdom has quality. All right, wash your robes and then set off!"

Means for the disciplining of beings

During my stay at Wat Pā Suddhāvās, I finished washing the robes on the second day. I spent the night in the sālā, where there was a room that had been partitioned off. One morning after the meal, I bowed to a Buddha statue in the style of the Pārileyyaka episode, that they had made out of concrete. There was the elephant figure offering a lotus goblet and the monkey figure offering a honeycomb. Then I sat down and contemplated, following the stream of retrospection:

"This elephant is only an animal, but he is well-mannered as he attends to the Blessed One. He offers a lotus goblet, which he presents neatly with his coiled trunk raised humbly and gently, not stiffly and obstinately. And then he will also become a *paccekabuddha** in the future. As for the monkey, he respectfully offers a honeycomb with both hands. As soon as it is offered, the Blessed One will eat. The monkey jumps up into a tree full of joy. He jumps back and forth, misses, falls down and dies on the spot. And then he is reborn as a devaputta, you see!

The Blessed One had turned away from the monks in the city of Kosambī, who simply did not want to be told anything. They had split into two camps of five hundred each. He had tried to persuade them to come to an agreement among themselves, but they wouldn't listen to him at all. The Blessed One did not investigate the affair in order to give victory to one faction and defeat to the other, because he saw that [the cause of the dispute] was a small, insignificant matter. And both sides had an equal number of supporters, five hundred each. Therefore, he didn't make a judgment. If he had decided on victory and defeat in favour of one party, the dispute would have become even worse. At the same time, he could see, 'If I turn away from this group, go on foot to Rakkhitavana Forest and spend the rains retreat there, the lay people will no longer respect the monks from this group and say that the Blessed

One has withdrawn because of this group of stubborn people. And they will no longer give them alms. And then these monks will realise their mistake for themselves. Both parties will mend their ways of their own accord and get along with each other again. They will settle the conflict through *tiṇavatthāraka-vinaya*, the procedure of covering over with grass, genuinely and earnestly.'[137]

When he had thus applied *anāgataṁsañāṇa,* the knowledge of the future, he decided to withdraw. He didn't withdraw because there was no door to settle the conflict. Oh no! The Blessed One had plenty of means with which to educate the beings of this world, and they truly served their purpose: means with subtlety, means of intimidation, means of equanimous treatment, uplifting means, means of irony and discussion, means of demonstrating miracles, means of foreseeing and mind-reading, means of driving away, means of comforting, and this very means of withdrawing himself on foot, as in the story of Pārileyyaka, which I am contemplating just now as I sit here."

While I sat in front of the Buddha statue and contemplated in this way, tears flowed in a continuous stream. And this went on for a really long time, about fifteen minutes. But at the same time, I was afraid that Than Ācān Mahā Phaibūn might see me like this. But it is what it is. Ever since I started practising, it has been in my character to be crazy in this way. Being crazy in this way can probably be treated with the highest medicine, by way of the Buddha's teaching, and the treatment is most likely not even particularly difficult. It's probably not like the craziness of a mental illness.

A house invitation accepted

After I had stayed three nights in Wat Pā Suddhāvās, I bowed in the morning after the meal and took a shortcut across the airfield to Wat Pā Dhātu Nā Wehng, but didn't stop there. I crossed Bān Nā Hua Bõ, took a detour to the left and crossed Bān Phõk. I spent the night at Bān Kham Khā in an abandoned forest monastery that Than Ācān Dī[138] had built. I spent the night there, got up early and went to Bān Kham Khā for alms when the time was right. After

passing just two houses, someone came towards me and urged me to give him my alms bowl and follow him to his house, where a house blessing was taking place. He asked me to forgive him for receiving [the bowl] in the middle of the road because he hadn't known that the most venerable monk was coming; he must have arrived quite late in the evening, with all due respect.

"Yes, I really did arrive late. I met a child who showed me the place to stay in the abandoned monastery. I haven't drunk any water, washed my face or bathed. If you really want me to come, then bring me water in that strip of forest over there. Let me first wash off my legs and face."

He quickly brought water and said, "The water is clean, there really are no living creatures in it."[139] His house was in the middle of a forest thicket. There were places all around where I was out of view, and after I had washed and dried myself, I went to his house. But he washed my feet again. There were about eight monks in his house for the blessing ceremony. "Bāhuṁ" was not recited. He took the bowl from me and placed it in the row [of other bowls]. After food was put into the bowls, [those present] received the five precepts and made the offering in the "Saṅghassa" manner. I asked to be allowed to recite apalokana.[140] He said they had often gone via Khām Cave on that mountain to Luang Pū Mun to pay their respects – lay people and monks alike.

When we had finished the meal, they brought over sets of robes and wax candles to be offered. There were about five sets of robes donated and about 300 baht in cash, a lot of money in those days.

After the handing-over ceremony, I said, "I have received this respectfully and am now respectfully giving it back to the monks and novices here because I only cut, sewed and dyed my lower robe and upper robe while I was staying with Luang Pū Mun. This year it's simply not yet time to [replace] worn out things. I met you on my journey and that was reason enough to agree to the invitation."

He said, "This is already a happy coincidence for all of us. We haven't viewed the most venerable monk in a bad light at all. In any case, he has already given us a lot in return."

"I also don't want to brag about my frugality and I don't want to brag about being blessed with wealth either. The monks and novices here also have a lot, so just keep [the robes] here at the monastery. If I take them, Luang Pū Mun and the Khrū Bā Ācāns at Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue will have second thoughts about me. It would look as if I had only gone into seclusion in search of the four requisites and just returned to the old monastery for a stopover."

"Yes, if that's the case, then we'll just bring the cash donation over later."

"That's even greater still! Escaping the tiger and bumping into the Lion King!"

"Yes, if that's the case, then at least take this block of beeswax and this pair of candles."

"All right, but I'll just take this pair of candles here for the pūjā with Luang Pū. Then his community will share in the merit."

And so the matter was settled in an amicable and nice way. Then I said goodbye to them. He said, "If you want to go to Luang Pū Mun from here taking the most direct route, you will be there at noon." He sent someone along to accompany me, starting out from his house heading due west. The route went along the mountain ridge, at times through forest, then across fields and then through forest again. He took me about six rope lengths, so that I wouldn't get lost again. And then I said to him that he could turn back. He said, "With respect, don't get lost, please don't stray from this path." Then he turned back.

I focused my attention on meditating while walking. After walking like this for about fifteen minutes, I came across a large pond on my left, about five arm spans away from the path. Buffalo were lying everywhere in the water, about ten of them. They were all fat, strong animals. When they saw me, they jumped up as if on command, turned their heads towards me and swung their horns. As I walked, I talked to the buffaloes, "I'm following my way. You follow your way. We have no enmity or harm in mind for each other." And then I was able to pass safely and without danger.

After another fifteen minutes, I entered a bamboo forest. Anicca, dukkha – somehow I lost my way. I had no idea how the various paths there were connected. So I wandered back and forth and in circles in that bamboo forest. I wandered around for another fifteen minutes or so. The hot season had already begun. Sweat was pouring off me, I was soaking wet. There was no cooling breeze in that bamboo forest; it was hot and humid. Then I heard someone chopping with a machete about eight rope lengths away. I hurried in that direction, fearing that the sound might cease. But they stopped chopping before I had reached them. I stood rooted to the spot and listened. Then I heard voices and hurried off again until I finally caught sight of them. It was a man with his wife and a boy about six or seven years old. When they saw me, he asked, "If I may ask, where is the Venerable One coming from?" – "From Bān Kham Khā." – "Oh, are you? We're also from Bān Kham Khā. We want to make a field gate. Where does the Venerable One want to go?"

"I want to go to Luang Pū Mun in Bān Nõng Phue. I left the Venerable Master to go into seclusion in the twelfth month,[141] but at that time via Bān Phra Kham Phū. Right now, I'm lost. Please tell me how to continue, that would be meritorious for you, and in no small amount because I have been wandering around in circles, totally soaked, for quite some time."

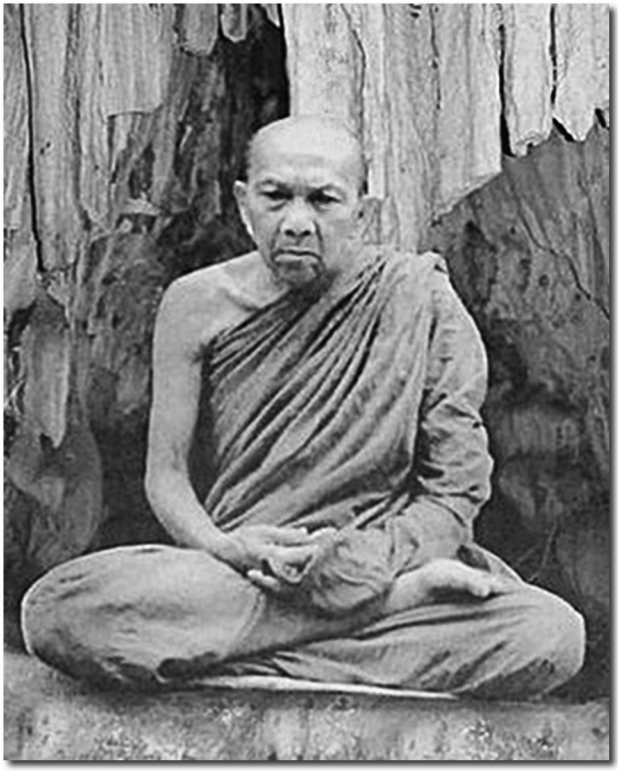
After these words, he said to his wife, "Stay here for a while with the child. I'll accompany the monk." He wanted to put my bowl around his neck, so I said to him, "Oh, the bowl is quite light, no burden for me. You better go ahead with the machete, I'll go behind, that's all fine. You've worked hard with the machete and must be quite exhausted by now."

He took me about ten rope lengths, then we arrived at the ridge and met the path. Now everything was clear, and I said to him, "My dear lay follower, I now know where I am again and I remember it because Phra Ācān Mahā's group once took me here to make sweepers (brooms). Back then, I sat on this rock here and tied sweepers."

The layman raised his hands in añjali and turned back. I gave him a very short blessing, appropriate to the situation.

Back with Luang Pū Mun (1947/48)

We are always on time for birth and death. The reason for this is that this body encased in skin already carries the lump of birth and death within itself in the sense of true Dhamma.



Phra Ācān Ōn Ñāṇasiri, 1950

Back with Luang Pū Mun

How is the meditation going?

I decided to follow the shortest route and made it to Wat Nõng Phue. I put the bowl down in the sālā and rested for a moment. It was already around one thirty in the afternoon. My eyes fell on Luang Pū's Kuṭi. It didn't take long before I saw the Venerable Luang Pū come out onto his verandah. So I put the robe on diagonally, with one shoulder uncovered. I carried the lid of my bowl, which contained the candles that I had brought with me from Bān Kham Khā and toothpicks. I slowly walked towards him. When I was close to the stairs, he saw me and said very softly and gently, "Well, where has our Than Lā come from? You came sneaking up all by yourself. Your character is quite different to the community. You go alone, and come alone. But your ankles stick out. When you walk, they make a noise when they bang together."

The master didn't specify whether that expression "quite different to the community" was meant in a positive or negative sense, but I hadn't said anything in response to him because I realised that in speaking, he was attending to his own business. And that business was to check up on me: will he just walk and talk or will he also wash and dry his feet? When I had finished bowing, he continued to bombard me with questions, his previous formulations mixed with new ones. I raised my hands [in añjali] and respectfully informed him, "I have come from Phā Daen Cave."

"How is the meditation going?"

I told him respectfully, "The flavour of the heart was seclusion and solitude. In the postures of the body – standing, walking, sitting, lying down – there was mindfulness of body and mind, when turning to the left and to the right, when stretching and bending the limbs, there was a knowing in almost every posture of the body. The heart was devoted to Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. Tears flowed

and took some time to stop again. I was almost never afraid of wild animals or ghosts, just occasionally I had certain feelings about a large snake. I had crazy thoughts in my mind like: 'If I sit in meditation, it could come and devour me on the spot.' But feelings like that only came up for a moment, and then I was able to banish them. However, they would occasionally reappear for quite some time."

The master asked, "Why are you afraid of it? If the snake swallows you, just kick it in the stomach from the inside." After these words, he smiled. Then he gave me the opportunity to tell him more. I said:

"One evening at midnight, I had my awareness focussed on the breath. As the breath became more and more subtle, the realisation came up: oh yes, for someone who is already liberated, there is no front and back, as with the out and in of this breath. For someone who is still struggling and striving, who wants to experience liberation, there is also no front and back, as with the out and in of this breath. For one who doesn't have any khõ wat for liberation, for escape, there is also no front and back, as with the out and in of this breath. For one who has the opinion that there is no good and evil, there is also no front and back, as with the out and in of this breath. When I contemplated this, knowledge was present at the same time as the out and in of the breath. There was no before and no after. Then contentment arose, and I yelled at the top of my lungs, and then rebuked myself: 'Going nuts, huh?' I quickly answered back: 'If I'm aware that I might be going crazy, then I might as well prevent it.' Whatever may be wrong or right about this, I ask Father-and-Mother Khrū Bā Ācān to correct it."

The master lowered his gaze for a while, then he said kindly, "Yes, you have truly grasped this aspect of the Dhamma." After these words, he summoned the novice Bunpheng, "My dear Sāmaṇera Pheng, take his things to his former kuṭi. He has just returned from a cave. He should stay in a cool place as before." Then I asked for the opportunity to be allowed to fulfil my duty to resume the nissaya relationship. He then asked me, "I've heard people talking about there being calf bark[142] at Phā Daen Cave. It's a really big

tree. Have you seen it?" I replied, "With respect, I haven't noticed anything and I don't know which tree it is."

"I want to have them cut up and brought here to cover the seating platform. It's time to do something to relieve the haemorrhoids at my exit."

When the Saṅgha came up for the meeting at 7 pm to hear a Dhamma talk, the master began to speak, "If you want Khuṇ Lā to go back to look for bark at the Phā Daen Cave, [then please consider that] he has only just arrived and is certain to be tired now. On top of that, the four or five clay ovens that he made before he went into seclusion are all broken. And because there is no one else here who can make them I don't want him to leave again right now, as otherwise the monastery will lack a man who is versatile and can be used for rough and heavy work." Phra Ācān Mahā Bua then spoke, "Why, I will fetch them myself tomorrow."

At daybreak, the Venerable Mahā Bua really did set off, alone and on foot, as that was the only option at the time. It was clear to me from the outset – and I was not mistaken in my hunch – that Phra Ācān Mahā Bua's journey to collect calf bark from Phā Daen Cave was by no means the result of foolish talk. Firstly, he wanted to be of service to Luang Pū out of a sense of respect and confidence. Secondly, he wanted to find out whether Than Lā had really been alone in Phā Daen cave for a month or not. And if he had really been there, how had he behaved, to what extent had he socialised with the lay people? Did he eat from the alms bowl or next to it? Was he demoralised or satisfied? What did he talk about during his stay in the cave when the lay people came to see him on the Uposatha? What did he say, what did he preach? These are a few examples. But I had already expected this and therefore had no problem with his returning. On the contrary, I was happy that I had had the good fortune of having an eminent Khrū Bā Ācān as a witness.

When the Venerable Mahā Bua had been gone for about more than more than a week, he did indeed come back with the calf bark. And then he went around and behind my back told the community, "This Than Lā is one of us, alright? I have investigated. There's

nothing to find fault with him. But those who don't see what's in front of their noses, if they're aiming for liberation and the escape from suffering, then they'll have to struggle quite a bit in their efforts to attain higher states of mind and higher Dhamma."

Those were the words that Phra Ācān Mahā Bua had spoken to the community behind my back. I learnt of it when someone in the group told me. Then I considered it with impartiality, without welcoming it, without rejecting it.

Whoever does good in the world every day can count on growing in goodness, whether in the worldly or the supramundane field. If they do bad things by day and by night, they can expect to accumulate more and more bad things. But bad things come easily to a bad person. Bad things are difficult for good people. Good things are difficult for bad people. Good things come easily to good people. They are and always will be opposites. The good lies on the side of the roots which are promoted by the Buddha's teaching. The bad lies on the side of that which is prevented by the Buddha's teaching.

One who knows the roots of good and bad, and one who knows the fruit of good and bad – according to the Dhamma, they have one and the same meaning. And there is no distinction based on class or caste. Evil and merit, virtue and vice, path, fruit, Nibbāna are all particularly impartial dhammas. They are not dependent on gender, class or caste, not taken in by any prejudices. As for class, caste, party and group affiliations – they are dependent on what one has [kammically] created.

Going into seclusion – in forests, on islands, in jungles, on mountains – is not a walk in the park or a leisure activity, not a means to show off or to collect accolades in the world. It is a means of self-examination into the essence of the inner climate: are saddhā, confidence, and paññā, wisdom, in balance or not? Viriya, the bringing up of energy in the Dhamma of the meditation practice, kammaṭṭhāna; sati, right recollection in the meditation practice, kammaṭṭhāna; samādhi, firmness in the meditation practice, kammaṭṭhāna – to what extent are they balanced with each other? Which of these aspects have already been absorbed into the inner climate?

Kāmavitakka, sensual thoughts; byāpādavitakka, thoughts of ill-will; vihiṁsāvitakka, thoughts of harming – these things have come to rest when the mind enters the first jhāna. When it comes out of it, do these things get worse again or not? If they don't get worse again by using a certain method, then take note of that method. If they do get worse again by using a certain method, then take note of that method. If they are completely torn off by using a certain method, then take note of that method.

Kāmavitakka, byāpādavitakka, vihiṁsāvitakka – is there also some good mixed in with the downsides or not? Or are they completely bad? They are not good in any way, not even a little! Do I clearly recognise this as true or not? Or is this just a perception learnt by heart, something rehearsed, heard, a practised way of expression? Like the "Yes, yes"-parrot, "eating rice with bananas".[143] These topics are self-assessment topics, to simply gain clarity. Otherwise, it becomes a practice of guesswork, as if one is trading, buying and selling, but not knowing on any given day whether one has lost capital or made a profit.

Even if one stays put in the monastery, one still has to examine oneself in this way from time to time and to shake oneself up. One can't leave this out, because otherwise one will take off on a flight of fancy.

Methods for self-assessment in the meditation

I have retreated to a number of places to stay in seclusion, without any social contact to any visitors. A place is ideal if [the village for the] alms round is not overly far away and not too close. A day and a night have twenty-four hours.

How much should I ideally eat? How often should I change my bodily posture so that it's okay? How long should I sleep so that it's okay? How should I allocate my time so that it's okay? If I sleep for so and so long, to what extent does the meditation achieve something substantial? If I drink so and so much, to what extent does the meditation achieve something substantial? If I eat so and so much, to what extent do I achieve something substantial in the field of

meditation? These are topics of self-assessment that we take and use in order to derive personal benefit from them.

If we adhere to this or that meditation method as a pillar of contemplation, then what is the benefit? For example, if we contemplate the body? For example. If we pay attention to the air flowing in and out as we breathe, what is the benefit? If we contemplate *Buddho*, what is the benefit? If we contemplate mettā and *karuṇā**, what is the benefit? If we focus on *āpo*, *tejo*, *vāyo*, *paṭhavī*,[144] what is the benefit? If we contemplate aniccaṁ, what is the benefit? If we contemplate dukkhaṁ, what is the benefit? If we contemplate anattā, what is the benefit? If we contemplate the heart as a whole and Dhamma as a whole, as they come together in the "knower" in the here and now, what is the benefit?

These things are to be experienced truly and clearly in one's own inner state. It's not necessary to doubt or question anyone else about all of this. But we must not be reluctant to ask questions and we must not be reluctant or one-sided when listening.

We should research further. Whenever we know clearly, practise clearly, we don't fall back into difficulties that make us doubt and feel uncertain again. Then we don't need to ask anyone else. To use a rough analogy: we taste salt and then we know what salty is. We don't have to ask anyone: "Oh please, what does salt taste like? What is salty like?" We also have no way of ever wanting to know again because we have already tasted it.

And so it is also with the flavour of the Dhamma at each respective stage. It applies here accordingly. And with states of mind at each respective stage, it also applies accordingly. If we must not be reluctant to ask questions, then we must not be reluctant to answer them. For among the beings of the world with their humans, devas, māras and brahmas, even including the arahants, there is communication, question and answer, at both the conventional and the highest levels.

Even animals roar and call to one another: a question and a reply in order to convey meaning. For example, when they catch or eat food, they call and ask their group of friends. The group hears this and flies there in response or flies away in response or stays

put in response. If, for example, someone harms us but we don't harm them back, can it be said that we have responded or not? You could say that we have responded, but this doesn't really matter because we have responded in goodness and without harm.

Then there is another topic, because the formations of the heart make use of the formations of the body. When one writes, one just has to keep writing. But one shouldn't get annoyed when writing, then everything is fine. And this applies to readers and listeners too. One shouldn't get annoyed when reading and one shouldn't get annoyed when listening, then everything is fine. Because getting annoyed means we are getting annoyed for ourselves. We can't get annoyed on behalf of others. Regardless of whether we eat delicious food or bland food, we eat for ourselves. We can't eat for others, no matter what. It's the same with getting annoyed. We could be annoyed for someone else if they were annoyed for us in return. The annoyance resides in *our* heart. Does someone come and take the air we breathe away? Even if they don't get annoyed in return, does their non-annoyance haunt us or not?

Deciding this matter in terms of true Dhamma is and remains a matter for each individual. It can be expressed in words, depending on the stage we find ourselves at. It is true in the conventional sense, but also coupled with truth in the highest sense, *paramat*,[145] in a kind of mixture. It is not the really big highest sense because it is still mixed with reference to the person in order to convey clarity to the listener, the reader and the observer. For in the scriptural discourses and in the monastic discipline there is a mixture of references to persons and to Dhamma. The highest sense refers exclusively to Dhamma.

This poses the question: Can someone who is intent on practising according to the Vinaya and the suttas be said to be practising in the highest sense or not?

The answer is: They are already practising within themselves in the highest sense; for the word "vinaya" means the discipline of body, speech and mind, and the word "sutta" means the formula of body, speech and mind.[146] One who has no mind cannot practise Vinaya. One who has no mind cannot practise suttas. Those who

have no mind cannot practise the mind in the highest sense. This means that paramattha, the highest sense, relates entirely to Dhamma and mind.

But I would like to make it understood: no matter whether Vinaya, sutta or paramattha – of course anyone can practise this, with the exception of crazy people, idiotic people, people whose behaviour has sunk below the human level because they don't have suitable conditions to be able to practise because kamma of the bad kind and its consequences still weigh heavily on them; much like a lotus flower that is still under water. Yes, they are indeed human beings, but they are fourth-rate human beings. That is why the Supreme Teacher has not allowed crazy people, idiotic people, people whose behaviour has sunk below the human level, to be ordained. But if this is not known [at the time of ordination] and they receive ordination and it becomes apparent after ordination, then they must be expelled, i.e. they must be made to disrobe, because they have not fully attained the human condition, and when questioned before the saṅgha have not answered correctly with regard to the obstacles to ordination: "Manussosi?" They simply answered mechanically, "Āma, bhante."[147] They are not in alignment with the truth because they are crazy or an idiotic person.

The question arises: But the person who is writing his autobiography here is emotionally crazy, isn't he?

The solution is as follows: Being emotionally crazy is still better than being crazy in a dry way.

It makes you wonder: What would being crazy in a dry way be, do tell?

The answer: To be crazy in a dry way is to drift about in worlds of saṁsāra, to get stuck, to not turn round, to not look, to not build on wisdom, to not dissolve the stains of delusion. For example.

The next question: This word "delusion" – how is it that one is deluded?

Answer: Deluded by the skin that encases the body; by seeing it as beautiful, as permanent, as a source of well-being; by taking it up as a possession, accepting it at face value until this can no longer be

undone. But if these things don't go according to our wishes, then we suffer in our hearts. It backfires because we are deluded by our skin.

Question: Is there anyone who is not deluded by the skin?

Answer: This point is difficult to answer. Someone who isn't deluded by their skin doesn't write it on their forehead. And if it is written there, it isn't necessarily true, because the person concerned may have been deluding themselves when they wrote it. Because being deluded by the skin isn't dependent on the eye, ear, nose, tongue or body. And the non-deluded is also not dependent on the eye, ear, nose, tongue or body. It is dependent on the heart.

Question: What is the essence of the heart? Why do I never get to see it? And yet worldlings and people in the Dhamma are always talking about the heart.

Answer: One who asks about the heart, asks with the heart. And one who answers, answers with the heart. The dead cannot ask and cannot answer because the heart is no longer involved.

Question: Is the heart good or bad?

Answer: If it does bad things, it is bad. If it does good, it is good. No one can kidnap or otherwise seize the good or bad in it.

Question: Who gives it a name?

Answer: It gives itself a name.

Question: Who is its owner?

Answer: It itself is the owner.

Question: What was it born from?

Answer: It was born of itself.

Question: What led to its birth?

Answer: Its delusion caused it to be born.

Question: What is its delusion?

Answer: Its delusion lies in taking its own existence at face value, in believing it to be real.

The Dhamma of Luang Pū Mun

Let's come back to the story. In the Bān Nõng Phue period, during the time when the author was staying with the master, did he hear that the master claimed to be an arahant or not? A dignified answer to this is that the master had neither claimed to be an arahant nor claimed to be any kind of worldling. But perhaps the author had simply had no idea and the master had therefore not entrusted him with his secrets. That may well be. Or the master had feared that his listener might be unable to understand and would not believe him, which would have been very damaging for him. That too is possible. And so, he simply didn't tell him anything.

As for the master's Dhamma, at times it was very high-level Dhamma, such as: "Dhamma, no matter what aspect: if you conceive yourself as partaking, then it is already completely wrong." This point made a great impression on me. When the master taught in this way, Phra Ācān Mahā Bua was also in the audience. Two or three monks were seated together to listen. There were no *āgantuka** monks among them. But one thing is strange: Luang Pū Mun's biography[148] has now been printed several times; I have read through it, but this aspect of his Dhamma doesn't feature in it at all. Perhaps it's because each monk remembered different lessons and guiding principles as being important.

They published *Muttodaya* as a booklet in time for the cremation of Luang Pū Mun's body. High-level Dhamma in the volume consisted of the statement: "When you have no abode, you enter and abide in zero-zero."[149] This is the core statement of the entire book; it stands or falls on this figurative statement. And that's all it has to offer in terms of high Dhamma. The reason why one should dwell in zero-zero is explained in the book as follows: "You can't say that zero has no value, because when added to a one it makes ten, one hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, one hundred thousand, one million." This is the mathematical result, the conclusion of the scribes Ācān Mahā Seng and Ācān Thõngkham. At that time, Ācān Mahā Bua went into seclusion and devoted himself wholeheartedly to the practice. He didn't take part in the social game of writing books.[150] I have contemplated the matter at arm's length

and believe that the reason why zero is a thing with value is that there is someone who takes hold of it as its owner. If no one takes hold of the zero as owner, it becomes null and void, in accordance with [mathematical] convention. But this doesn't only apply to zeros. It is the same with duck poo and chicken poo. If there is someone who takes possession of it, then of course it becomes an object of value. You can buy it, sell it or scatter it on vegetables. If someone steals it, it's theft.

But Nibbāna is not the duty to sail somewhere or enter into something in order to dwell in the double zero. But in that case, there actually is a nullification – *saranaṁ gacchāmi*[151] – that belongs to Nibbāna. But the Supreme Teacher only spoke of flames that are multiplied by the fanning wind. As soon as the flames are extinguished, there is no longer any reason to claim or assume that one is dwelling here or there or doing anything else.

If in a war of viewpoints, the views get out of hand, they will take on a life of their own, and for someone who still has big kilesas, they become automatic. This is quite different from the automatism of a noble one who takes the noble Dhamma as a guide, as a magnifying glass, as a mirror, as a microscope, as a yardstick, as a measuring cup, free from guessing, estimating and supposing. At the same time, they have *sammāñāṇa**, true, genuine knowledge, far removed from worldly limitations. It's completely impossible to pull this down and place it next to the world, next to the world around, the world unstable, the me-world, stupidity-world, you-world,[152] in the past, now and forever.

No matter whether it is the biography of Luang Pū Mun or of some other monk. No matter whether it is compiled and written down in detail or only in brief – if the essence of the Dhamma in it, the peak of high-level Dhamma in it doesn't really make sense, then it wouldn't go straight to the heart of the wise reader or listener, wouldn't touch them in the Dhamma as it really should. Nor would it be inviting to read or listen to. Moreover, [the person described] would be open to criticism, [for example like this]: "He is famous for all sorts of things on the right and genuine path of Dhamma; he doesn't live up to that reputation."

If the writer is not the one who is described, then the interpretations will only correspond to the writer's inner being, because that is how he understood it, because that is how it presented itself to him. But this is as inconceivable as his innards,[153] it is beyond being able to be determined.

The period spent at Wat Pān Bān Nõng Phue, Phaṇṇānikom, Sakon Nakhõn province marked the last stage of Luang Pū Mun's life. It was also the culmination of his high-level Dhamma. Other aspects of his Dhamma, with all the various methods of conveying it, including his khõ wat, his excellent practice, with which he became a role model for others, building a bridge for later generations – all these are offshoots of his teaching: "Dhamma, no matter which aspect: if you conceive yourself as partaking, then it is already completely wrong." The expression "Dhamma, no matter which aspect" is in its essence referring to "heart, no matter which aspect". "The knower, no matter which aspect" is also contained in its essence. "Realisation, no matter which aspect" is also contained in its essence. This shows and makes clear that [Luang Pū Mun] had already destroyed grasping within himself.

Now I'm returning to my chaotic narrative, which is quite jumbled because I just write everything down as it occurs to me. There's no methodical sequence. It's such a jumble because I have no experience in putting it all together and writing it all down. And I probably won't be tested and graded on it in any schoolyard in any world.

Luang Pū Mun cremates the body of Ācān Niam

In that very year 1946, in the month of May, on the seventh day of the waning moon, in the morning after returning from the alms round, we prepared to distribute the food in the bowls for the meal. Phra Ācān Niam, who had more than 18 rains, had been ill for just over a month. A reclining platform had been erected for him on Luang Pū Mun's old covered walking meditation path, about seven or eight arm spans away from the eating sālā. There he breathed his last breath in a most impressive way. There was no kicking or

rolling around of the body. His breathing simply became weaker and weaker and then stopped. Extremely graceful, extremely beautiful, extremely inspiring. No groans or moans, no raised eyebrows, no contorted mouth, no flared nostrils. He just closed his eyes peacefully. The author saw it with his own eyes and pondered it with his heart. Phra Ācān Mahā Bua saw it the same way.

Luang Pū Mun was in the sālā and already knew when they informed him. He said, "Mmh, Than Niam has already left. He has taken his last breath. He often told me that he already knew the conventional ways of meditation. Everyone, come to the sālā and let him lie in peace for the time being. Put your requisites away after the meal and then we'll talk again." And then we left him in peace, nobody kept vigil.

When we had finished eating and had transported our requisites to the kuṭis, Luang Pū Mun walked over from his kuṭi. When he reached the body, he bent over, grabbed the bast mat [on which the corpse lay] with both hands at the head end, pushed his legs into the sand and said, "We are just too stupid! We all walk together through birth and death for fun and then we burn each other's corpses for fun." As soon as he had finished, Phra Ācān Mahā said, "When the time comes, we'll take over." Saying this, he raised his hands (placed together) to his forehead. He took [the mat] out of Luang Pū Mun's hands. Luang Pū replied, "But we're not doing it for fun!"

Now the monks arranged themselves around the body and grabbed the bast mat – the senior monks at the head end, the monks of middle monastic "age" in the middle and the new monks at the foot end. They picked up the body and took it to the southeastern edge of the monastery grounds. Luang Pū Mun said, "Go and tell the lay people in Bān Nõng Phue that Luang Pū wants to burn [the body of] Ācān immediately and on the spot." Then he said to the novices, anāgārikas and monks, "Go, quickly gather firewood." Everyone hurried up, The monks collected dead branches, the novices and anāgārikas cut fresh wood and then mixed the different types together.[154] Enough firewood was collected in no time at all, as there was no shortage [at that time of year]. Luang Pū

then said, "Lay the body on its right side. No need to wash it, no need to put on the upper robe. He is already dead, so why wash and dress him? Take off his new silk belt and keep it for when someone needs one."

When everything was ready, he told the anāgārikas to quickly light the fire. At the height of the hot season, the flames rose quickly. When the people from the village arrived, the flames were already blazing brightly. At this point, he had everyone spread their sitting cloths on the ground and put their upper robes diagonally on one shoulder. He said, "We will now recite Matikā, the funeral ceremony together, but will not charge anyone for it."[155] When we had finished, everyone returned to their lodgings. Towards evening the fire burnt down. All that was left of the corpse was the skull and the breastbone. As night fell, Luang Pū said, "Do you really want to watch the fire burn the Ācān the entire time? Come on, practise walking meditation and mind development, otherwise you will die and have wasted your time."

I was keen to find out whether or not the master had the death recitation performed as a ceremony to drive away spirits, and came to the realisation that he did not bother with such things. Then I thought that this Luang Pū really was someone very special, to whom hardly anyone can compare these days. He didn't use the body as an excuse to organise an event with his followers. He believed in kamma and its fruits; kamma that we ourselves bring about while we are still alive.

The elder brother of the deceased, the lay follower Phaeng from Bān Khohk Nā Mon, had arrived several days earlier. Phra Ācān Niam was also a man from Bān Khohk Nā Mon, not from somewhere far away. Luang Pū Mun revealed to the monks and novices at that time, "Than Niam was already a *sotāpanna**, a stream-enterer, and has reappeared in the Ābhassarā heaven."

And then I waited to find out more. What would Master Luang Pū do next? Would he give hints to the lay people like: "A monk has died now. It would be good if merit could be created in his name. If anyone has even a smidgen of faith, please contribute to the fund-raising." Venerable Luang Pū said nothing of the sort. He merely

said to lay follower Phaeng, the elder brother of Phra Ācān Niam, "If you want his bones, just take them. I don't want them because I have no need for bones. I won't miss those bones. If you can use bones, then take them with you." Lay follower Phaeng politely said, "I won't take them because I don't need them either." Lay follower Phaeng had actually agreed with Luang Pū Mun's reasoning in every respect for quite some time, without contradiction and without any half-heartedness.

The readers and listeners are probably not familiar with that era, but I as the author am, and that is why I have dared to write all of this down. If I hadn't written it down, important aspects of the story wouldn't have survived and would have been forgotten. This kind of thing leads to today's world adopting questionable attitudes in this regard, and this ends up with everyone doing their own thing when it comes to practice.

Luang Pū Mun didn't need to justify himself at any cost.[156] What I want to say is that Luang Pū Mun never neglected the dedication of merit. He was not out to impose his ideology on Buddhists everywhere. He was neither narrow-minded nor rambling. His sincerity was impressive. He didn't like busyness. He built a monumental bridge for the lineage of thudong and kammaṭṭhāna monks. He believed in kamma and its fruits before death.

Attā hi attano nātho[157] – this is very true; for those who live up to the status [of thudong and kammaṭṭhāna monks] are those who shoulder the klod and carry the bowl, who walk uphill and downstream, who eat from the bowl with a sense of ease, who seek abodes in forests with a sense of ease, who practise meditation while walking and sitting, who talk about nothing but the path, fruit and Nibbāna with a sense of ease. These are a few examples. And there are plenty of other topics for the author, readers and listeners to contemplate together.

Those who practise at full steam to escape from the suffering of saṁsāra are already directly dedicating merit to themselves and to all three worlds. And it indeed serves as a great bridge for the inhabitants of the world. Excellent practice is a pull factor for those who are bent on the escape from suffering in this very life. Seeing

the danger in saṁsāra for even one moment is much greater than drifting in saṁsāra for millions and millions of moments. Resigning oneself to the world and resigning oneself to the blazing coal pit of the defilements – these probably have one and the same meaning, one and the same flavour. But those who aren't interested, they will be bored hearing it.

For one who does good and wants good, one who wants bad and does bad becomes a hindrance. For one who does bad and wants bad, one who wants good and does good becomes a hindrance. But the bottom line is that the two of them differ greatly. And the cause for the good path and for the bad path is dependent on making the right decisions, the right choices. One who doesn't know the cause has no access to knowing the effect. One who doesn't know the effect has no access to knowing the cause. One who knows the cause knows the effect. One who knows the effect knows the cause because it draws them to clarity. For them, it's not a problem, no matter when.

Storing corpses in the time of the Buddha

One thing needs to be explored in order to get some backing on the subject of corpses. At the time of the Buddha, the cremation of a monk's or novice's body probably took place every day at Wat Pā Jetavana Mahāvihāra. If they had wanted to store the corpses, there wouldn't have been enough storage rooms. The Venerable Aññā-Kondañña attained parinibbāna at Lake Chaddanta. Wild elephants performed the tasks associated with the cremation. We cannot know how long the elephants had kept the corpse. And I also don't know where the elephants invited monks to recite *Kusalā* because I have learnt little and know little – and it is therefore embarrassing.

The Venerable Sāriputta and the Venerable Moggallāna both parinibbāned before the Supreme Teacher. How long the Blessed One had their bodies kept by the saṅgha and the lay people is beyond our knowledge; this is also not documented. The Venerable Rāhula parinibbāned in Tāvatiṁsa heaven.[158] We also don't know how long the devas kept the body. Also, we don't know whether the

devas performed a transfer of merit with a food offering of nectar and ambrosia.

Then the argument comes up: All these instances concern arahants. We cannot compare ourselves with them!

And the reply follows immediately: Exactly! And that is why the arahants wisely and with foresight built a bridge for the people of the world. It took seven days for the Supreme Teacher to be cremated, although the Malla rulers had repeatedly tried to light the pyre earlier. The fire however couldn't be lit because the devas wouldn't allow it. They were waiting for the Venerable Kassapa, who was on his way to pay his respects to the body of the Buddha, together with 500 other monks.

But when I have died one day, I would start to stink if anyone wanted to wait for the Venerable Mahā-Kassapa. However, I have already instructed in my will that they shouldn't wait for anyone. They should only wait until they have finished collecting firewood. No one needs to say *Kusalā* either. No one needs to open their mouths for *Anicca*[159] either because I have already learnt that piece. If I die in a forest monastery, there is no need for anyone to make a coffin because [my corpse] doesn't have to be lifted up and carried past some people's houses. The only exception would be if I were to die in an unpresentable situation. If I were to die in the morning before the meal, cremate [my body] after the alms round and meal, unless there are some hindrances or it is raining heavily. Or if in the middle of the night the firewood cannot be collected in time. I firmly believe that there is no shortage of firewood in Thailand.

If money comes into play in the cremation, then there isn't easily enough of it there because the realm of enough doesn't exist in the nature of Mammon. The same goes for some people's livelihood. Using a corpse as an excuse to take money out of other people's pockets is referred to as a difficult death because it causes difficulties for others. It is not an easy death. It becomes difficult for young monks, old monks and little novices who keep the wake. They lose their appetite and they can't sleep.

There is the argument that all this is a matter for the bereaved. And the blunt answer is that it is a matter for the person concerned,

having left a clear wish that came from the depth of their heart. If they hadn't done so, they would have carelessly neglected to make arrangements for the future and thus plunged the bereaved into difficulty and uncertainty. If anyone criticises the survivors for being too narrow-minded and distasteful, then they have a valid will that they can refer to. If someone has only left their last will and testament verbally, their words may be forgotten. But if the deceased left it themselves in their own handwriting, drawn up without coercion or influence, then it becomes all the more credible; for [the will] has been written with confidence and a million per cent sincerity. And it is also an expression of maraṇasati, the awareness of one's own mortality, without recklessly suppressing this fact that one must decay and die. In this way, the rank of a person who doesn't place any great demands on the funeral is fulfilled because it is neither fish nor meat that those left behind have to pay for. A rollmop and a sour herring with gravy will do just as well.[160]

Let us turn to the subject of the corpses of lay people at the time of the Buddha. The story of Mrs. Paṭācārā, whose parents were super rich, is well known to everyone who is familiar with the Dhammapada. On one single day, several people had just died. A storm had raged during the night. In the morning after breakfast, they burnt three or four bodies in the rubble of a collapsed house. And what about the woman's husband and her two children? Her husband had been bitten by a snake and died on the spot. He was left there and neither cremated nor buried. Her small child was carried away by a hawk and buried freshly caught in its stomach. The older child sank into the waters of the Aciravati. The current swept it away and the body was never found.

The woman lost her mind, went crazy to the point of walking around naked in all her madness. But in the end, she was ordained and attained arahantship. All these corpses had led her to the healing of all grief because she had completely burnt all the skeletons in her closet, her own defilements, before she died. If I wanted to write more about this, it would become a history of the Therīs.[161] It should just be a counter-example to the practice of keeping corpses for a long time. But perhaps I will now hear the claim that the time of the Buddha is outdated, and that the present is ahead of its time.

I don't intend to confuse the readers and listeners here to the point that they start racking their brains. Luang Pū Mun would certainly have objected. I also don't want to turn hearts into deeply hidden abysses of hell, laden with inner conflicts. But I would like to recommend this to practitioners for their own contemplation. In some cases, it may help to relieve worries about one's own corpse. The only concern then is with life, to make haste in endeavouring for the good, to escape suffering in saṁsāra quickly and without delay, in this very life.

In addition, birth, old age, illness, death are normal for one who is familiar with them, but only if they have learnt the art of disenchantment in order to be able to escape from these things, whose origin is in the defilements of the heart. It's about clearly recognising the truth therein for oneself, in accordance with the teaching of the Blessed One, line by line. It's not about decreeing something based on the automatic nature of one's own conceit, which just becomes a thorn in the Dhammavinaya; for Dhammavinaya is complete in itself, there is nothing missing anywhere. A parable about food: if your hands are washed, you can eat straight away.

Cremation of corpses as is proper for practice monks

So on with the story: In that year 1946 in the Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue era, another monk, Than Ācān Sõ, nine rains, class one Dhamma expert, died in the middle of the rains retreat. He originally came from Bān Śī Ṭhān, Amphoe Lumphuk, in Ubon Rātchathānī province. At the time of writing this, it is probably part of Yasothõn province.

He had been ill with a fever for a month and died as a result[162] because at that time a cure was out of reach. But whatever the time, whatever the age, in all three worlds that revolve, someone is born every second and someone dies every second, without pause, that is certain. If birth and death occur every second in this way, age and illness must also have the same meaning. To dismiss this as an insignificant trifle is to make a habit of forgetting oneself, forgetting

the inner self, forgetting the heart, forgetting Dhamma. One picks a flower and worships delusion, negligence and folly, strengthening them more and more.

Therefore, the Supreme Teacher, in his great compassion, had said to the Venerable Ānanda, "To contemplate death a hundred times a day is still negligent. Is that clear, Ānanda? Contemplating death every time you breathe in and breathe out is not negligent." If we understand that he addressed this only to the Venerable Ānanda, [we must ask ourselves]: In all the worlds, is there no aging, sickness and dying? Is the Venerable Mahā Ānanda the only one who dies?

But as it is, the Dhamma, the teaching of the Awakened One, pours out directly into all three world spheres in every line and every verse. Take for example: *Jātipi dukkha.*[163] This one statement alone relates to the three world spheres. It shakes even the deaf and blind among beings in which consciousness haunts, without exception.

Let us return to the further account of Phra Ācān Sõ's death. The cremation followed the same pattern as that of Phra Ācān Niam not deviating from it at all. This clearly showed that Luang Pū Mun was building a bridge for his kammaṭṭhāna disciples as to how to deal with the corpses of kammaṭṭhāna monks. And it also threw a clear light on the fact that he expected his disciples to do the same with his body after his last breath, with an inner attitude of appreciation for quiet Dhamma. There can be absolutely no mistake about this.

The people of the world prefer to keep a corpse for a long time, for the sake of worldly honour. To burn a corpse quickly is considered useless. But I insist that a corpse be burnt quickly for the honour of true kammaṭṭhāna monks because I don't want to lay snares and set traps to lure and manipolish[164] anyone, neither straight on nor in a roundabout way.

But now the argument will probably come: those who live far away will not arrive on time, that's how it is. The truth however is that everyone arrives on time, no matter when they come because the one who has already taken their last breath will not return any-

way. No matter when you arrive, it is always exactly in time for the state of being a deceased person; unless you were to learn of the death of the person concerned and then realise on arrival that the dead person had previously been resurrected. Yes, then you could talk about not having arrived in time for death. We are, however, always on time for birth and death. The reason for this is that this body encased in skin already carries the lump of birth and death within itself in the sense of true Dhamma.

Someone who is "on time" in the deeper sense of birth and death – who could that be? And I would like to answer spontaneously: it is the arahant, because an arahant's realisation is a match for birth and death[165] and, as a result, the arahant is no longer born and no longer dies. So, apart from this exception, one is subject to birth and death.

Yes but, can the author even see an arahant?

The answer: When I even hear the word *arahant*, I am already inspired to the highest degree and full of confidence. But if I ever see one in real life, I'll write more than just this – so much that the reader will get tired of reading.

Strictly speaking, if we look for an arahant in this casing of skin, then of course we won't find one: because an arahant is not a ghost guarding the casing of skin. If the casing of skin were already the arahant, then cattle and buffalo – for example – would also all be arahants. Whoever, in contemplating the casing of skin, penetrates to its repulsive nature or to the fact that it is simply composed of the elements of earth, water, fire and wind, or whoever, in contemplating this, penetrates to the three characteristics, is on the path that leads solely to arahantship. And when one has reached arahantship, that is the opportunity to see an arahant. If one hasn't yet arrived there, one is left only to guess and speculate; no matter how much one debates and argues with others, one cannot see [the arahant]. And if not arguing with others would mean arahantship, then earth, water, fire, wind, in which no consciousness is floating around, which never once argue with each other, would all be arahants.

If one gets bogged down when learning but doesn't leave any questions open, one is taking learning too lightly because one is learning with conceit and entrenched views. If one gets bogged down when learning and leaves questions open, one makes it difficult for oneself to learn because one loses one's superiority. That's why this world is full of teachers. Learners, on the other hand, are harder to find because everyone wants to teach others, if not straight on, then in a roundabout way. Conceit, arrogance, these are weighty defilements of the heart. If we didn't have the Supreme Teacher's teaching as a guide, we would be even more at their mercy, we would have no foothold. Those who truly believe his teachings are probably in the minority. The war of hostilities, the war of dangers, is therefore in every tract of grass and in almost every tract of the heart.

System of practice in Wat Nõng Phue

I would now like to continue the report on my continued stay in Luang Pū Mun's samnak. During the Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue period, his instructions and teachings made use of a variety of skilful means and approaches. But whatever the means and approaches, they all served to move those who wished to see, hear and know to contemplate the quick escape from suffering in saṁsāra because we weren't ordained for fun and don't practise for fun, for example to lull ourselves, to deceive the world or for material gain. The master often preached in a rousing way so that his disciples were shaken up by it.

The Bān Nõng Phue period marked the last stage of his life. He took on a great many disciples but no more than fifteen monks [at a time], no more than four novices, no more than two anāgārikas and no more than three *mae chīs**. But he didn't allow mae chīs to live in the monastery grounds. They set up a place to stay, far away from Luang Pū's monastery and the monks. It was on the outskirts of Bān Nõng Phue to the west. The forest monastery where Luang Pū and the monks and novices lived was located to the east of Bān Nõng Phue at the end of the rice fields. The wat of the women in white and the wat of the monks were no less than twenty-five rope

lengths apart. And the master didn't allow monks to go there and contact them, for example to have bowl covers crocheted or belts woven. Or if they came in the morning to bring food, the only person who they reported to was Luang Pū.

Lay people who had come from far away would look for a place to stay and eat outside. Whether they were regular visitors from the village or visitors who came to *tham bun** from elsewhere, they didn't take their meals in the monks' sālā, but instead ate together elsewhere, with the exception of times when one or two male visitors came from distant provinces to study the Dhamma. Or if they had come to visit a sick monk or novice, then they could look after him and spend the night near him. But then they had to stay there and eat there too, but just one meal a day like the monks. During their stay, they kept quiet not making a racket. They did this of their own accord, there was no need to compel them to do so.

Phra Ācān Mun's lifelong rag robe practice

On the topic of the alms round, Luang Pū Mun recommended that his students practise contentment with the food that had been put into the bowls. He didn't think much of it if something was then sent [to the monastery] as so-called later food. He approved of eating everything together out of the bowl, both sweet and savoury, and not to put a spoon into it, but to use the hand as a spoon. On the subject of robes, he welcomed [the use of ownerless] paṁsukūla cloth that had been deposited at the kuṭi or on the stairs, on the way to the toilet, near the path for walking meditation, on the way to the alms round as well as in the eating sālā.

But Luang Pū had a few more refined peculiarities. There were a few things that Phra Ācān Mahā Bua had noticed and which he shared with me, so that I could also become aware of them. Phra Ācān Mahā Bua said to me, "My dear Lā, I have noticed something about Luang Pū Mun. Any paṁsukūla cloth that his supporters have put in places that are accessible to the community – for example on the alms round route or at the sālā or under trees that are far away from his kuṭi – he won't use such cloth for himself, even if

he needs it. So, you can say he only uses cloth that they have thrown away at his kuṭi, near the stairs, near the toilet or by the walking path. Look yourself if you don't believe me." So, I paid attention to it, and it was indeed true. For the master was very meticulous about only using things that no one else had claimed ownership of. And even the things that they had thrown away close to his lodgings and that he didn't have to worry about using for private purposes, even those he gave away if one of his students needed them.

In the time of Nõng Phue, Phra Ācān Mahā was a disciple of Luang Pū Mun who had really penetrated deeply into every method of the path. Luang Pū Mun entrusted him more than any other monk with tasks in all areas. Regardless of whether he wanted to change one robe from the set of three or all three, or whether it was a matter of storing something specifically for the Venerable Luang Pū Mun in terms of robes or various articles of daily use, including tonics – all of this was the task of Than Phra Ācān Mahā. Unnoticed by Luang Pū Mun, he gave the monastic community pointers so that they could understand the context. And Luang Pū Mun didn't arrange this. He left it to Phra Ācān Mahā Bua to work for the master out of his own initiative, directly or indirectly, in a profound or ordinary way, whichever. For his part, Phra Ācān Mahā revered him deeply. And he was never wrong about Dhamma and Vinaya, for the Dhammavinaya states: "Any monk or novice who pushes in front for the four requisites that have rightfully come [to the community] and gains an advantage by bypassing the *theras** of the community or monastery concerned, commits an offence of the *dukkaṭa** class." This is stated in the Vinaya-Piṭaka.

According to the Buddha's teaching, other highly venerated people can't be exempt from this either: on the householder level, the principle can also be applied to parents. If the sons and daughters of a family push in front when consuming and using, and take advantage of their parents or grandparents, then they lack respect and a sense of honour and don't fulfil this aspect of the Dhammavinaya either. They deem themselves in an ungrateful way to be equals.

Even if the master had overemphasised grace when consuming and using, there must still be graceful upāyas. And while juggling with these upāyas, I would like to respectfully point out that it is by no means excessive to do so. If the Venerable Luang Pū thought something was in any way excessive, he would relax it with decency. If he didn't think it was excessive, he explained the reasons for it properly so that we could understand, because we were putting his admonition respectfully into practice. And he also explained everything in a respectable and graceful manner.

A subordinate cannot admonish their superior with harsh or sarcastic words. The Vinaya states that the superior is entitled to admonish his subordinate, depending on the circumstances, according to the issue and with reason. However, the Dhamma and the Vinaya forbid acting out of revenge and any physical punishment, as this would be excessive. The Awakened One has already taken care of that really well.

Accommodation in the time of Bān Nõng Phue

Here on the topic of accommodation: Master Luang Pū didn't like building anything fancy at all. Good enough to live in, that was enough. The highest level of comfort was unplaned planks for the roof and floor. The same applied to the walls. At that time, there were only four buildings with plank floors and plank roofs, plus the Uposatha sālā, another building. It was about six metres wide and about eight metres long. It was an old, old-style sālā that they had built before Luang Pū Mun had settled there. The eating sālā had a floor made of fāk, as previously mentioned. All the other buildings where the monks and novices lived had a floor made of fāk bound together with vines and secured with strips of bamboo. The walls were just a weave of banana leaves and "deer's ear" leaves. The door was just a piece of wickerwork wall with eyelets to push it open and shut. The windows were each a piece of wickerwork wall. A pointed piece of bamboo cane was used as a support fork to hold them open when needed. The washing line was made from three strands of coarse cotton cord, as there was no shortage of cotton. The main roofing material used for the kuṭis was cogon grass.

Normally, every year at the beginning of February, repair and mending work was carried out on the roofs, which centred on bundling grass. At such times, the lay people took part, but all the monks and novices also bundled grass. Nobody could use any kind of trick to get out of the work, unless they were really ill. It was not permitted to be noisy when working. If there was a good reason, people would speak, but only loud enough so that they could hear each other. When firewood was being split, the only sound to be heard was the sound of the work itself. At a distance of one rope length, voices could no longer be heard. But if a voice could be heard from a distance of one rope length, well, then that would be the voice of Luang Pū himself.

But no work was done that went beyond the boundaries of the khõ wat. For example, sweeping and scooping water, tidying up the tools and everything associated with this was done properly and not sloppily neglected. If the project hadn't been completed after working two days in a row, Luang Pū would make a break for a day. He feared that [the practice of] samatha and vipassanā would deteriorate, so work continued for a while and then paused for a while.

This break related to work at the monastery as a whole, but when it came to the daily khõ wat in connection with the Khrū Bā Ācān and the daily community tasks, being late was not an option. These things were obligatory. One's own personal khõ wat, practising walking and sitting meditation at night, was also compulsory. It was also not possible to argue that you hadn't rested during the day and therefore had to sleep at nightfall or get up late in the morning, unless you were really ill and in pain. If it only hurt a little and you lied that it was severe, Master Luang Pū knew it. And those with good eyesight in the circle of friends knew it too. The science of laziness, the science of least resistance and the science of selfishness in material matters simply didn't exist in Luang Pū's samnak. If they had existed, they wouldn't have been able to make great strides, not in one way, not in another way.

I never tire of writing about the time at Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue. It was deeply satisfying for me because I saw with my own eyes

and contemplated with my own heart. I don't need to draw on any external sources, on anything I have heard from others.

These other sources only come after the outer ear, the outer eye. It is the inner eye that is the eye of wisdom. The eye of wisdom at its highest level can banish delusion and stupidity. Stupidity and delusion and ignorance and defilements are one and the same. The accumulation of wisdom, disenchantment and liberation banishes and breaks through the scattered mind.

Important theras come to study Dhamma

If one wants to refer to Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue as a meeting point for practising monks and novices at that time, that would not be wrong. To say that this meeting point is the heart which is made up of sīla, samādhi, paññā, is also not wrong. But if I don't write [more on this] now, the readers and listeners will be waiting for me to get to the point: Get writing! If you don't get to the point, it would just be a waste of time.

In that very year 1947, on a single day during the hot season, a number of eminent senior monks came by chance, without appointment, from different directions and provinces to discuss Dhamma with Luang Pū in the samnak: Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī from Udõn, Phra Ācān Singh from Nakhõn Rāchasīmā and Than Phra Khrū Something – I've forgotten the name; Than Cao Khuṇ Ariyavedī (Khian, level 9 Pāli scholar) from Kāḷasin, Luang Pū Õn, Luang Pū Fan, Phra Ācān Mahā Thõngsuk and Phra Ācān Kongmā.[166] At that time, Luang Pū Õn was staying in Wat Pā Nõng Dohk, Phaṇṇānikhom district. Luang Pū Fan lived in the Dhātu Nā Wehng forest monastery, in the district of the provincial capital Sakon Nakhõn, Phra Ācān Mahā Thõngsuk in Wat Suddhāvās in the same district. And there was also Phra Ācān Kongmā from Wat Dõi Dhammacedī, but this monastery name hadn't yet been registered at the time because the monastery had only just been built. Sometimes he also stayed at Wat Pā Bān Khohk.

On such days, when many important monks came to visit, storm lanterns were lit at 7 pm and the bell was rung in the Upo-

satha sālā (not in the eating sālā, which of course would have been far too cramped).

After everyone had finished bowing together, they sat sideways for about two or three minutes in silence. Luang Pū Mun spoke softly and in a peaceful manner, "Yes, today it is appropriate for me to study with you. If anything is incorrect, feel free to tell me, there is no need to be embarrassed. I have studied little, learnt little."

And then the master brought up the following topic: "The Supreme Teacher has decreed that there are eight exceptionally important points for the first instruction after an ordination. These are, firstly, the grandparents and great-grandparents of wrong behaviour, namely the four pārājika offences,[167] and then the four aspects related to necessities, which we should adhere to until our last breath, because they are the things on which one who has gone forth is dependent. They are called nissayas and there are four types – alms round, dwelling at the foot of a tree, wearing discarded cloth and the use of putrid urine as medicine. With the alms round, the Blessed One has built us a bridge that extends all the way to our last breath. But we are hardly going for alms; we tend towards the view that we are well provided for anyway; and then we expect that they will bring us something [to eat in the monastery]. And we don't want to go looking for discarded cloth at all. Nor do we seek to dwell in quiet seclusion. What do we think about these things? Are we conducting ourselves correctly in accordance with the instruction we received after our ordination or is the opposite the case? Do we have any deficiencies?"

Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī smiled – out of respect, by no means in a patronising way. And Than Cao Khuṇ Ariyavedī (P.L. 9) politely said, "Oh, there is nothing here where we could surpass Phra Ācān. Our knowledge is merely memorised in a non-committal way; with respect."

At that time, I had already passed the age of thirty. From the way all these theras at the gathering behaved, right down to the younger monks and the young novices, it struck me that they had as much courtesy, respect and love for Luang Pū Mun as they had for their birth parents. None of the monks sought to find fault with

Luang Pū Mun in any way, in any respect, in any manner whatsoever.

The meetings went straight to my heart and stayed in my memory so that I have forgotten nothing. It was as if an overheated body was recovering under the shade of a tall, large tree with fresh air beneath its twigs and branches. A breeze blew and cooled things down, to just the right extent, never too strong. This was what they called a cool gathering, not a heated one.

Then Master Luang Pū continued, "The Supreme Teacher gave an expression of his great compassion. He primarily taught and instructed bhikkhus first, which is why almost every chapter and almost every section begins with *bhikkhave* as the form of address. If the bhikkhus hadn't learnt and practised, then who else was he supposed to instruct? As for teaching lay followers, devas, māras and brahmas, the Pāli Canon speaks less about them than about bhikkhus. Whether bhikkhunīs, sāmaṇeras, sāmaṇerīs or sikkhamānās – we can see that they are less represented in the Pāli Canon than the bhikkhus. This thought occurred to me as I sat with my eyes closed in the way of an old person."

Then Master Luang Pū spoke about samādhi. Samādhi means to be anchored to a single object of contemplation. But when we have truly entered into concentration, then it is at this stage that we experience the taste of the Dhamma. When the power fades, we come out. If the special knowledge of liberation doesn't yet arise, then it is merely a gross resting place from [the preoccupation with] objects. It is said that: The heart takes a break from the gross work with its objects. But we mustn't simply get stuck on the taste of samādhi, because the taste of samādhi is a middle-level taste. With mindfulness and wisdom, we must penetrate into the heap of the elements through contemplation. In the form-group and in the name-group, we create a uniformity like a drumhead. Absolutely everything that is past, future and present penetrates through to the three characteristics, again with a uniformity like a drumhead, always progressing, without interruption. It comes together at the one anchor point in the present, in the face of mindfulness, in the face of wisdom.

As long as the knowledge of disenchantment hasn't yet manifested itself in its exquisite essence, we simply continue to contemplate unceasingly in this way. There is only this one path. There is no other path. Someone who contemplates over a long period of time but only intermittently and in bits and pieces, someone of coarse character who only just keeps their head above water cannot reach the knowledge of disenchantment. The turning away that would make it easy to dissolve delusion and clear out the intoxication, remains fruitless.

All types of samatha-kammaṭṭhāna, starting with the skin that encases us and going on to the millions of other methods, must trigger the wisdom that penetrates to all three characteristics; for the three characteristics are the meeting point for tranquillity of mind. And tranquillity of mind owes direct tribute to the three characteristics. The three characteristics owe tribute to the knowledge of disenchantment, nibbidañāṇa. Disenchantment owes tribute to liberation, purification and Nibbāna. The stream-enterer has already opened the door to Nibbāna, but has not yet reached the centre of Nibbāna. They cannot yet hang around in Nibbāna.

In reality, of course, Nibbāna has no form-door, no name-door, no edge, no centre, no coming and going. These are simply just similes, comparisons; for the word is verbal formation. Nibbāna is neither a word, nor a thought, nor any taste, like for example salty. This is a gross taste in the world of the tongue, in the world of contact: a contact takes place, and then one experiences saltiness, unless the sense of taste is disturbed. But even if the sense of taste is disturbed, the taste of salt is and remains salty in accordance with the nature of its reality. In the same way, it doesn't matter that words and thoughts can't reach Nibbāna. Nibbāna is, according to its nature, deathless. The impaired tongue can be compared to not yet knowing the taste of Nibbāna.

The master drew further comparisons. A *baddha-sīmā** that has been established by the saṅgha correctly and without flaw can be revoked by a saṅgha of four or more monks by means of recitation. But supramundane dhammas are more subtle than that – from the stream-enterer up to the arahant. Even if all the Buddhas and all

their noble Saṅghas were to recite simultaneously in order to revoke stream-entry from the heart of the stream-enterer and make them a puthujjana, a worldling again, this would of course not be possible. It is for this reason, that all the noble ones respect the Dhamma from the bottom of their hearts and by no means in a lukewarm manner. One cannot say that all the noble ones, because they no longer have attachments, do not respect Dhamma. They respect Dhamma vastly more than a worldling, immeasurably more. You can't say that because attachment and grasping have been extinguished, they no longer have khõ wat or respect for Dhamma. That would be like being a noble one who has left their realm and become a noble one in the manner of the Venerable Devadatta. But even he realised his mistakes, although by then it was almost too late. And so he no longer had time to ask the Blessed One [personally] for forgiveness. He only asked [for forgiveness] from a distance. He could only raise his shoulder and touch his neck and head in a humble gesture.[168] That is why he will become a paccekabuddha in the future; for he had already worked on the pāramis for two uncountables and is still lacking 100,000 major eons. But until he can overcome the immediate kamma[169] through his practice, he will remain on the worldly level.

The saṅgha gathering with Luang Pū Mun lasted until midnight that day. There were all sorts of things.

The consecration of Buddha statues

I will now continue to report on how Luang Pū's practice built a bridge for his students and their students. There is still a great deal to tell.

Soliciting and begging, directly or indirectly, as well as having events to collect money in connection with construction or repair projects – these things were not part of the nature of Venerable Luang Pū's khandhas at all. Amulets and pendants, small Buddha or monk statues for sale, consecrating Buddha statues – these also did not exist in Venerable Luang Pū's way of living. The art of awakening a Buddha statue with magical formulas, uncovering and poking

around its eyes and ears or ceremonially ordaining it – these too were not part of the Venerable One's non-violent ways.

He said, "If it is already a Buddha statue by general agreement, how can we improve it by ordaining it? The Blessed One was ordained before us. How could we improve it through awakening it? The Blessed One was awakened before our time and had already entered Nibbāna without remainder. How should we be able to improve it by poking around the eyes and ears? His outer eyes and inner eye, his outer ears and inner ear are already better than ours. What else should we consecrate and bless him as? He is already a fully awakened Buddha. Why should we cover and smear the statue with magical rituals? Such a thing is evil in essence. And this is exactly the pit of hell, the abyss of wrong view, when you are wrong in every way and still think you are right. You take sides with yourself, but not with Dhammavinaya. That is enough to make it impossible to distinguish between right and wrong. And when much more subtle dhammas arise, then how could you grasp them?"

If I say much more, it could become dangerous, but for wise people it would be beneficial. But people don't like to hear unpleasant things, and I will have to put up with the claim that my words get in the way of the interests that begin with "M".[170] But if I'm not allowed to speak now, while I'm still alive, then I don't know when else I should speak, because once I'm dead, I can no longer speak.

And most of us have a misconception that whenever we do good, we are cowards. But when someone tempts us to do bad, and we throw ourselves into foolhardy behaviour, we may boast about how determined we are. Wise people brag about how determined they are on the path of the good. Fools brag about how determined they are on the path of the bad. The fruits of each are completely opposite. The taste of these fruits is also as different as heaven and earth. Of course, everything that is endowed with consciousness in the three world spheres has determination. If the heart strives for the good, then it will reap good fruits according to the price category of the good action as the cause. If the heart strives for the bad, it will reap bad fruits according to the price category of the bad action as the cause.

The Venerable Devadatta was determinedly on the path to the Great Avecī Hell. An *anāgāmī** has a heart that has arrived at the path that is free from sensuality and hatred. An arahant has attained a quality of heart that is free from defilements.[171] Flies are determined in their consumption of urine and faeces. Bees and bumblebees are determined in their consumption of pollen.

Since this is the case, it becomes increasingly clear that whether inner cause and effect take place on the bad path depends on causes. Whether a lot or a little, it is dependent on causes. The elimination of bad causes must take place in the heart. The building up of good causes must take place in the heart. Even when causes are infinite, it is the heart that is the builder. Even with infinite effects, the heart remains the receiver. It is not possible to survive defying the rational principle of cause and effect. *Gambhīro* means to be "profoundly satisfying". When the heart wants to make something profound, it becomes profound. If it wants to make something superficial, it becomes superficial, because the heart is the doer. But it must do this with the qualities of mindfulness and wisdom. Otherwise, it can become like a student who has no teacher and doesn't know their own limits. It becomes like a ball of cotton wool in the wind, or wood floating in the water, or a paper kite with a torn tether.

That is why the Supreme Teacher emphasised that we are not helplessly at the mercy of the heart. We can tame it when it is time to tame it. *Purisadammasārathi*, we can train the heart like a charioteer trains the horses. When we have trained and polished the heart, we have brought well-being to the heart, like a knife that we have honed and provided with sharpness. Therefore, we usually say that the knife is well-sharpened. We don't say that this quality is sharp. If the knife isn't sharp, we usually say that this knife is really not sharp. We don't say that this quality is really not sharp. This is a pretty superficial picture as a means of comparison, but the knife doesn't claim to be a knife either. And it also doesn't claim to be made of polished or unpolished steel, right? Because that is a convention that we use in the circle of existence, because the heart is the starting point of all conventions.[172] The convention of path, fruit, Nibbāna is the Great Convention, something high. But the

taste of the convention of path, fruit, Nibbāna is far removed from the taste of the convention known as the defilements of the heart. It cannot be seen with the outer eye, which is located below the forehead. The eye below the forehead and the eye of flesh, have one and the same meaning.

All eyes of wisdom can be reduced to two types: the eye of worldly wisdom and the eye of supramundane wisdom. The eye of supramundane wisdom is the eye of wisdom that takes the shortest path out of the mass of suffering. The eye of worldly wisdom is the eye of wisdom that circles around in the mass of suffering because it is travelling on the road of greed, hatred and delusion. This is called the Great Circling in the threefold world spheres.

One could also say that the word *threefold* refers to the "threefold robe" in the Order of the Tourists in Suffering, or the three funeral pyres, or the prison in which the beings who hang around in saṁsāra are stuck. One could also call it the jungle of greed, hatred and delusion for those beings who have fun going on sightseeing tours. If one wanted to speak of the great and all-encompassing hell, this too would be correct. No matter how much one wants to talk about it, one will never come to an end. And not talking about it is of the same benefit. Both are of the same value if the defilements of the heart have not been brought to an end; for the defilements of the heart do not depend on the realms of speaking or not speaking. If arahantship could be attained by speaking and talking, then crickets could chirp[173] all day and geckos could cluck and click all night and so become arahants. If arahantship could be attained by remaining silent, then the kinds of creatures that have no mouth and cannot speak would all be arahants. But no! [Arahantship] it seems, is attained through right mindfulness and wisdom! If those who are practising for the escape from suffering in saṁsāra are attached to speaking, then that is not correct. If they cling to non-speaking, that is also not correct. Idiots, the blind and the deaf, for example, cannot receive ordination in the Buddha's teaching, but they can, however, help us to study the science of disenchantment and deterrence in the mass of suffering.

I would like to deal with a different topic now. Luang Pū Mun didn't approve of having a permanent kitchen service for cooking food in the monastery, unless the alms round really was totally insufficient for nourishment and there was a real risk of hunger and thirst. The master quoted from the instruction given after ordination, "If one receives nothing but rice on alms round, the Vinaya already praises this as *atirekalābho** in the view that it is sufficient to enable study and practice in the Buddha's teaching. In the matter of cloth for robes, this already applies to coarse cotton cloth. Cloth made from tree bark is already considered [normal] gain. In the case of accommodation, this means empty huts. The shade at the foot of a tree, a rock overhang, a cave or a kuṭi, a kratõp made of leaves, for example, are already considered a gain. When staying for the rains retreat, there must also be a closable door as an entrance and exit. If it is made of banana leaves, that is enough. All of this counts as a gain. In terms of medicine, for example, khām põm or samõ pickled in old urine count as a gain.

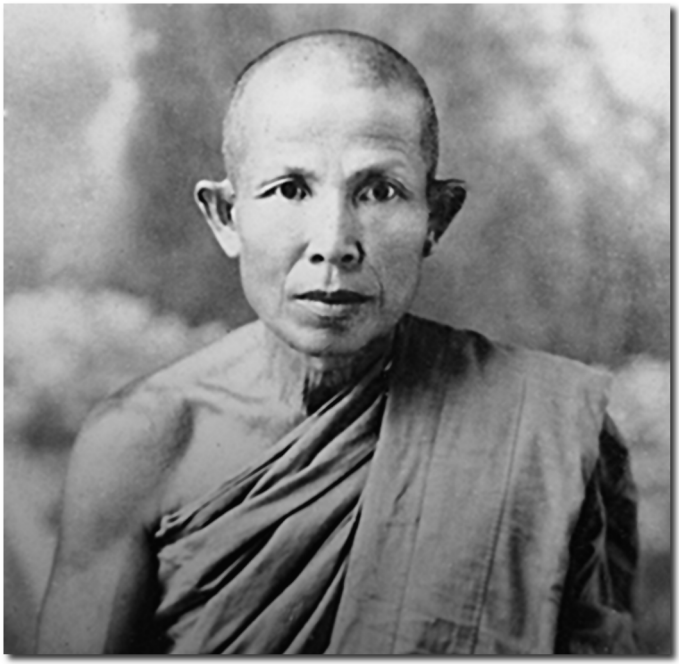
When we have contemplated this, [we realise] that at that time there was tremendous appreciation for frugality, great devotion to accepting life and accepting death for Dhammavinaya as a means of grinding away the inner defilements. But the fondness for convention nowadays is mixed with all sorts of anxiety. One may wonder at this, but that which belongs to materialism is already in the pockets of the Venerables Aniccaṁ, Dukkhaṁ and Anattā; for it is the Court of Dhamma that is always, at any time, passing judgement on the formations – whether gross or subtle, external or internal, near or far, past, future and also present – and doesn't come down from its pulpit. And no questions remain unanswered. If there are no more questions regarding the formations, then their deceptions and tricks, no matter through which gate, can no longer deceive. One can tread on their fingers because mindfulness and wisdom can tread on the fingers of wrong understanding. Wrong understanding cannot survive and has no place to hide.

One who practices to escape the delusion that ferments in one's being, that leads to clinging, to staying in the workshop of materialism, and who does not apply their wisdom to impermanence, suffering and not-selfhood, will naturally find it difficult. Progress in

the Dhamma at a high level will be difficult. And then the secret service of the formations of the world will be called into action. The world, that is the formations. The beings of the world ... The world, that is the mass of beings. The opportunity for the world ... The world, that is the face of the earth. The secret service is called into action in the past, the future and also in the present. Once the secret service is alerted, one's own practice begins to falter. Then one reaches for everything like someone who has fallen into the water, into every alleyway, into every corner of one's heart: "Oh, what am I supposed to do?" This then becomes a permanent state. A practitioner who clings to the heap of *name-and-form** is in the dark about that very heap of name-and-form. One who is unclear about the whole world, about all formations, holds on to all of their signs. Sign means symbol. Assigning importance to being a real and true being, a person, a self, an I, a someone, until it can no longer be corrected and resolved. At the same time, this wrong view continues to plunge down deeper and deeper. It is difficult to muster the strength and courage to pull oneself out of it because it is already so deeply ingrained.

The end of an era (1948/49)

If we know the end of birth and we know deathlessness, then further knowledge doesn't matter.



Phra Ācān Kongmā Cirapuñño

The end of an era

Luang Pū Mun's illness

Let us return to the story. Luang Pū Mun's illness started in the dry season of 1948. He had intermittent fever and a cough. After that the Venerable Luang Pū Mun was ill, but he was able to go on alms round for another six or seven days. He thought of recuperating in Bān Nā Nai for a while. So he said to Luang Tā Thõngyū, "My dear Yū, I will first go and rest for a while in the abandoned monastery in Bān Nā Nai, as it is about one kilometre away from Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue." And then he told Luang Pū Mahā to take care of the community. Whether the master wanted to go together with this or that monk, he said no word. (Oh, I apologise for having just written "Luang Pū Mahā", the form of address currently in use at the time of this writing. The words "Phra Ācān Mahā Bua" or simply "Phra Ācān Mahā" were the forms of address used at that time.)

Then Phra Ācān Mahā had the thought that he should assign a monk to accompany the master. Then, without Luang Pū's knowledge, he decided that he should send Than Thõngkham to accompany him. The monk then prepared his requisites quickly and in good time. Then the master left and stayed [there] for two nights. The monks and novices didn't dare go to visit him yet because they feared he would scold them: "I came here to get some rest. Why have you come here intruding on me like this?" All the monks and novices who had stayed behind, lonely and alone, were very sad and felt abandoned. It seemed to the eye and the heart that even all the different trees in the monastery were sad. The atmosphere was oppressive and even the wind wasn't blowing in. I myself walked restlessly up and down in the monastery, looking back and forth. The mind wallowed in melancholy thoughts and was occupied with external things. I missed Luang Pū constantly. The meditation was patchy and not deep at all. I was worried about all sorts of things:

"Luang Pū is probably struggling with the people in the village and the monastery or with someone else. I just don't know. That's why I'm really worried. Ouch, it's making me sick to my stomach, it's killing me."

At five o'clock in the evening when dusk was falling, I went to Phra Ācān Mahā, bowed and said, "I am not happy at all, and would like to visit Luang Pū, who is there with just Khrū Bā Thõngkham. On the one hand, I am afraid that the master will scold me, but my heart is so sad, if I may say so. I think I should go there alone and come back alone in the night, no matter what happens."

Venerable Phra Ācān Mahā replied, "Yes, I am just as sad as you are, Than. Just give it a try, I have nothing against it."

I bowed to Venerable Phra Ācān, then hurried off and arrived just as night was falling. At that time, Master Luang Pū and Khrū Bā Thõngkham were sitting on the ground. Before I had had a chance to bow down, Luang Pū spoke to me in a gentle voice, "Oh, Khuṇ Lā has come. Why don't you go and fetch some firewood and put it on the fire? Just leave the logs that aren't decent, alright?" At this point, Mr. Kilesa made my heart so sad that there was no stopping it. With my right hand I grabbed the firewood and put it on the fire, with my left hand I took the corner of my bathing cloth and wiped away my tears, because Mr. Kilesa was just pouring out of me. At the same time, I was thinking that I had been wrong in expecting the master to scold me for running after him and intruding like this. But the expression on his face and his gestures seemed to be the same as always. My experiment had produced a clear result: Master Luang Pū had taken refuge here. His affairs were none of my business, whether I liked it or not. These were matters I once again had no idea about. The tears flowed for about fifteen minutes, then my normal state of mind returned.

Master Luang Pū and Khrū Bā Thõngkham laughed. And Master Luang Pū uttered the following words, "An angel weeps, an angel weeps." He spoke and laughed at the same time, his fever had also subsided. Maybe it was because of the fresher air or whatever. That night, shortly after 10 pm, I bowed down in farewell and returned to the monastery. It wasn't yet time for Phra Ācān Mahā to go to

sleep. He was climbing up [to his kuṭi] from his brand-new walking meditation path, in the twinkling light of a lantern. I climbed up, bowed to him and told him each and every detail.

The Venerable Ācān Mahā pondered this carefully, and then said, "Yes, tomorrow morning after the meal, I will take everyone from the monastery and all the people from Bān Nõng Phue to the feet of Master Luang Pū to persuade him, to invite him, to implore him to return to our monastery as before because the people in the monastery and in the village are so sad and feel so abandoned. They can no longer eat or sleep. Even I am feeling down and very sad at the moment. I've been thinking hard about it for a little while, but it doesn't matter that it was only a little while. I have thought hard and thought this through, Lā, my dear Lā!"

In the morning, after getting up, the alms round and finishing the meal, all the lay followers streamed into the monastery together. The Venerable Phra Ācān Mahā made an announcement, the monks in the monastery got ready and put on their upper robes, and the lay people took a palanquin to shoulder Venerable Luang Pū on. The villagers and monastic community numbered about a hundred all together. When they arrived [where Luang Pū was staying], they kept still and silent. No one rustled, coughed or sneezed. Everyone bowed at the same time, and then an intelligent layman asked permission to politely let [Luang Pū] know that, "The period of time that Master Luang Pū has retired to rest has only been two or three days so far, but it feels like a hundred or a thousand years. The people in the village and monastery can no longer eat or sleep and are very sad and lost. I ask to be allowed to convey the request at the feet of Master Luang Pū that Luang Pū may please return to the old monastery. I ask for forgiveness for any offences on my part, as well as for any future offences. The people of the village and monastery will willingly comply with any aspect of behaviour that Luang Pū deems appropriate, in every respect. We will endeavour at all times with all our available mindfulness not to go against Luang Pū's principles."

Shortly afterwards, one by one, Luang Pū's requisites were packed. They invited him to climb into the palanquin and they

walked very slowly and gently, the bearers in front, followed by the monks. On Venerable Luang Pū's seat lay a mattress stuffed with dry rice straw. The master sat in the lotus position, not stiff and not listless. And he looked incomparably brave. I had so many defilements that I couldn't hold myself back, so I squeezed in between the lay people to have a hand on the palanquin. I thought to myself that I had the right to lend a hand to help [carry] Luang Pū's palanquin. But first I looked over at Phra Ācān Mahā. If he had given me a disapproving look, I would have backed away, but he continued to exude compassion. I thought: "Oh dear impermanence!" This guy's tears were spilling out and once again putting him in an embarrassing situation. The bathing cloth wiped the tears away the whole way.

Luang Pū sat with his eyes closed in a meditation posture. How did he know that my tears were flowing? It was because everyone proceeded to carry him quietly and slowly. Then Luang Pū began to speak gently and softly, "Lā, why didn't you wait in the monastery? You burst into tears so easily because you came along. You do have a strange character." And then the master sat in meditation in the lotus position until he arrived at the monastery.

When the Venerable Luang Pū had entered his kuṭi, the ranks of his disciples who observed the nissaya relationship were with him. They quickly put the upper robe on diagonally, with one shoulder uncovered, and asked to resume nissaya as before, according to the khõ wat of the relationship between Luang Pū and his disciples. This was, however, a personal matter for each individual who had previously had that relationship. I want to make it clear that only Phra Ācān Mahā and Luang Tā Thõngyū didn't ask for nissaya, because these two venerable monks already had a sufficient number of rains.[174] But whether Phra Ācān Mahā asked [for nissaya] or not, he already had a deep relationship in the regular khõ wat with Luang Pū anyway. There is no need to doubt or scrutinise this at all because Venerable Ācān Mahā was Luang Pūang's right-hand man and served as his assistant.

The dhutaṅga practices are the middle way

When times pass – the days, moons, years – the situation, the round of *saṅkhārās**, must also pass and fade away in each and every second. For old people, young people, middle-aged people: the formations, whether they are endowed with a mind or not, have only the one duty and that is to change, to alter with every breath.

In the first stage of his illness, Luang Pū went on alms round through the whole village. In the second stage, he went on alms round to the edge of the village. In the third stage, he walked half of the distance. In the fourth stage, he walked as far as the monastery gate.

In the fifth stage, he went for alms in the vicinity of the dining hall but still ate with the community in the dining hall. (Note: In the period when he no longer went as far as the village, the lay people arranged it so that they would come to meet him to specifically put food in his bowl and that of the monk who accompanied him – it was Khrū Bā Wan. Everyone else went to the village as before, led by Luang Tā Thõngyū and Phra Ācān Mahā. But they shortened the time and they left earlier than usual because they wanted to get back in time for the khõ wat duties.)

In the sixth stage, Luang Pū went to the bottom of the stairs of his kuṭi for alms. In the seventh stage, he stood on the verandah of the kuṭi for alms.

In the eighth stage, he placed his alms bowl on the verandah where he would sit down to eat. I would like to make it clear that from the time that Luang Pū started receiving alms on the stairs and on his verandah, he no longer went to the sālā to eat with his children and grandchildren. And only then was he willing to eat from a dish or plate and pick out two or three bites with a spoon.

Why did he take all this upon himself? Luang Pū didn't do it because he was stubborn or eccentric or to feed any sort of conceit or fixed views. He did it to build a mighty bridge for his children and grandchildren, being the last one bound to the khõ wat in life and death without ever faltering. One of such character receives full marks. Those who don't have such strength of character are given

the opportunity for idle talk, such as: "Whether you go for alms or not, there is always something to eat. So why should you go, for fear of not getting anything to eat?" If you like it that way, go ahead and talk like that. It is right in its own way. It isn't wrong, because in that respect Dhammavinaya doesn't make any rules; it's a matter of personal confidence. But it is also a means of grinding away the defilements. Some people make reference to Dhammavinaya when they claim: "The dhutaṅga practices are a form of self-mortification."

In a Dhamma talk Luang Pū once said, "Whether it is about dhutaṅga practices or the scriptures of the *Visuddhimagga** – they can be reduced down to the pāṭimokkha rules. *Mokkha* means to overcome that which is wrong, to escape from it. The dhutaṅga practices were put together as a middle approach for grinding away the defilements. If the monks no longer want to practise them, should any ghosts devote themselves to practising them?"

Of those 13 dhutaṅgas, each must inherently fulfil one, two, three or even four points. The reason for this: some monks are happy with their old accommodation and don't move anywhere else because they are satisfied with their accommodation. They therefore fulfil the point referred to as *yathāsanthatikaṅga*. Those who eat only one meal a day fulfil *ekāsanikaṅga*. These for example. Difficult, really, really difficult! Even those who don't [consciously] practise dhutaṅga, not even once, will still fulfil it in this way.

The author fulfils dhutaṅga by following the practice of wearing paṁsukūla cloth, by following the practice of limiting himself to one meal a day, by following the practice of staying in the forest, by following the practice of eating out of his bowl.

As for eating out of the bowl, I sometimes used a second vessel, sometimes for milk, sometimes for ice cubes poured into the drinking cup. And because there are sometimes things that are labelled as medicine against constipation.[175] But after 25 years of practising like this with an occasional extra vessel, I'm now back to stamping out [these weaknesses] and returning [to strict observance] because otherwise young monks and little novices will take it as an example. Whenever the *boss* is a bit slack, young monks and small

novices will take him as an example and never miss the opportunity to follow suit. Whenever he tightens the reins, they are repulsed and think that the weather is closing in.

As I write this down, 36 rains retreats have passed, and in terms of age, 70 years have passed. The time of belonging to the monastic order has the duty to pass, then let it pass. But if we take the defilements as a yardstick – whether they have passed or not, how much or little is left of them or whether they have disappeared without remainder from the nature of the khandhas – it is always dependent on the person in question. *Opanayiko** and *paccattaṁ**[176] sit on the judgement throne of self-examination and introspection. Otherwise, one merely intoxicates oneself with the benefits of having belonged to the order for a long time, with the power to mobilise and intimidate the masses. One picks a flower and worships one's own defilements.

I don't really want to write at the moment. It's as if my tongue is itching, as if my tongue wants to run wild. But I give in to the blemish of the itchy tongue running wild. The tongue is running wild, the fingers are itching, the writing hand is running wild, the heart is running wild. Running wild and running lild have one and the same meaning, because running wild, running through, running lild, running laild, running gaild[177] come from the heart. But when we have written, read, heard and contemplated this, we don't allow it to become the poison of annoyance and just leave it as it is, because everything we have thought up, everything we have conceived, just passes away. Because *cittasaṅkhāras* fit everything well into this very name-world, the world of naming, nāmaloka – into *nāmasaṅkhāra*, *nāmadhamma*, *nāmadhātu*, *nāmindriya*, *nāṁaṁ aniccaṁ*, *nāṁaṁ dukkhaṁ*, *nāṁaṁ annattā* – so well that no resistance is possible.[178] We know a lot about writing, about erasing, about gain and loss, about birth and death. If we know the end of birth and we know deathlessness, then further knowledge doesn't matter. But we have to be careful that we don't get all excited, overheated. If the heat has already gone out, then it's not difficult to be careful. But if it is still in our hearts, then we have to be careful. We have to be hot in the right way. To be careful means to not lose yourself. This applies to one who is not yet liberated,

when their practice has pervaded them completely. But why should someone who is already liberated be careful? They are free of blemishes after all. Those who still have blemishes simply must be careful. If they are not careful, then they are really wrong.

There are certain things, certain behaviours related to *lokavajja*, to that which is blamed by the world, that we have to take care of in accordance with the Vinaya. But we need not feel depressed about all these rules because the Supreme Teacher has proclaimed his teaching perfectly and free of any trace of the defilements. And yet some people say: "Why don't we just call the next council?"[179]

The author's answer: The Pāli Canon is perfect, there is nothing missing, there is nothing shallow about it. Those who are already standing in a glowing coal pit should refrain from wishing that the glowing coal pit of a council should interfere. The right path is the exact opposite. Kamma and its effect, that which has been done well or badly – this is, of course, the council of beings in this world in general, regardless of the time of day or night. One could say it exists in every breath. To say it exists in every mind moment is also not wrong. For mental cause and mental effect are already there in the present, no need to drag them into the past and future. The Pāli Canon can be summarised as being in the realm of supporting factors in the present mind and present Dhamma, both of which are already the realm of cause and effect. Yes, and that which is beyond cause and effect can be summarised into *Ekadhammo*, the One Dhamma in the present Dhamma, which is no longer born, no longer dies, no longer expires and no longer changes.

Whenever there is doubt about this, this very doubt is the cause and effect of the circling without beginning, without end. The first stage of non-doubt is the level of the stream-enterer. The last stage of non-doubt is the level of the arahant. The end of non-doubt can be divided into four levels according to the respective stages of path and fruit. The same applies to the truth, but this basically depends on the character of the one who has proficiency in the Dhamma. It is absolutely not everywhere in every form and every name.

Almsfood is superior

I want to tell a story about the Venerable Luang Pū that I left out because it only occurred to me afterwards. One day, when Venerable Lu Pū had become old and ill and was dragging himself along on the alms round to the village, Khrū Bā Thõngkham whispered hastily to the author, "When Master Luang Pū comes out of his room in the morning, he comes down to practise walking meditation before the alms round. You are looking after the fire in the clay ovens that you placed at either end of the footpath because you want to keep an eye on him. You're worried that he might trip and fall in, and so you're very close to the master while you're taking care of this. You could politely tell him at his feet that everyone in the monastic community thinks that you should humbly suggest to Master Luang Pū that he shouldn't have to go through the discomfort of the alms round. The monastic community will provide him with everything he needs to sustain himself. You could tell him this in private. That way, no one else would be involved."

I replied to Khrū Bā Thõngkham, "I see, so I should try to make this proposal to him in the most polite way possible. But I'm one hundred per cent sure that he won't accept it. And I take it that Phra Ācān Mahā has already thought about it. If there had been any chance, then he would have made this suggestion before us. And won't Phra Ācān Mahā criticise me for thinking that I'm so clever as to bypass him?"

Khrū Bā Thõngkham replied, "It doesn't matter! I will confirm that I am involved. If Phra Ācān Mahā finds it so wrong as to have a go at you about it, then I'll take it all on myself that I'm to blame for everything. If there are no more opportunities today, then make the suggestion to the master tomorrow when he is practising walking meditation in the morning. Then it will be just the two of you. No one will be listening because everyone in the group will be waiting together in the sālā at that time."

But I didn't make the suggestion that day because I hadn't yet told Phra Ācān Mahā. Besides, the timing hadn't been right, because on the days when Master Luang Pū came out of his room a little later, he didn't do walking meditation for so long because it

was almost time to go on alms round. But in the end, I didn't even tell Phra Ācān Mahā, and this guy here, who was supposed to humbly make the suggestion and invitation, thought to himself that it couldn't be so bad after all, and out of respect for Khrū Bā Thõngkham I wanted to follow his suggestion and just give it a try. As for that Khrū Bā Wan, he had already heard about it, thought about it and hadn't raised a single objection.

I called Khrū Bā Thõngkham and Khrū Bā Wan both "Khrū Bā" at that time, as befitted their rank, because I kept to the fact that they had more rains than me, but not yet five rains. I had it in mind to follow the practices of the Vinaya. I didn't intend to address them according to the customs of the Dhammācāns, as was the case with the Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Assaji.[180]

The following day, when the monks' saṅgha and novices had gathered in the sālā to prepare for the alms round, Venerable Luang Pū was walking up and down in walking meditation. I knelt on the ground nearby and waited; for when Venerable Luang Pū's illness symptoms had increased twofold, I was very close to the fire and kept watch, fearing that he might topple over and fall in. Kneeling on the ground, I raised my hands in añjali and said, "I request that I be allowed to tell Father-and-Mother Khrū Bā Ācān that the monastic community is united in making a proposal to Father-and-Mother Khrū Bā Ācān. We would like to implore him to forgo the alms round, as it is so difficult for him to drag himself back and forth due to his old age. Of course we are willing to bring almsfood for his sustenance, if you will pardon us."

Then Luang Pū stopped, with his legs slightly apart, and explained to me in a kind, and at the same time ingenious way, "We are all just the dust on the Blessed One's feet, the dirt under his fingernails. Going on alms round every day is useful. We have our khõ wat, the donors have their *cāga**-wat and *dāna**-wat. Every bit of rice or other food that falls into our bowls is superior to any [house] invitation to eat, and to any food that is brought to the monastery. This is clearly stated in the Mahākhandha and Paṭhamasambodhikathā.[181] Even single fathers and mothers with small children can place alms in the bowl, but they don't have time to

come to the monastery. And the little children follow in their example and come to give alms. They bow and greet politely, and that is also a blessing for their hearts. That is essentially what is meant when it is said that we are well meaning towards all beings. If we only proclaim this from the pulpit, then this isn't true at all. And another thing: When our Supreme Teacher had eaten the almsfood prepared by Mr. Cunda Kammāraputta, he went to the city of Kusinārā that same day. The next day his life span was over. So, to put it simply, we could say that the Blessed One had gone for alms until the day he breathed his last.[182] He built us a golden bridge, a silver bridge, a bridge of the treasures of the noble ones. If we do not take up the Blessed One's legacy, then we may be called reckless and headless. We should think about this carefully until we have understood it deeply."

When I heard this, I burst into tears because I was so deeply impressed and moved. And then it was time for the alms round.

Later, when Master Luang Pū couldn't go on alms round anymore, he didn't talk like that anymore and was willing to eat on the verandah of his kuṭi. When it was time for walking meditation, he would walk up and down his verandah in an arc. He used a walking stick that would tap on the planks of the verandah – teck, tock, teck tock. I felt so sorry for him, and it went straight to my heart, good heavens!

An instruction from Luang Pū

Time passed and the year 1949 arrived. Around the end of the rains retreat, the signs of ageing in Luang Pū had multiplied. Phra Ācān Mahā assigned the monks and novices to keep watch around the clock in rotating shifts under Luang Pū's kuṭi and in the surrounding area. But Khrū Bā Wan, Khrū Bā Thõngkham and I were not on the rotating shift because we were on standby to stay overnight on the verandah of Venerable Luang Pū's kuṭi. We had a number of personal duties, each covering different points. I had to regularly look after the fire in the clay ovens and be ready to clean up Luang Pū's bowel movements.

One day, in broad daylight, about ten o'clock in the morning, Luang Pū gave me the following instruction, "When I die, hurry up, burn [my body] quickly, nah!" He spoke softly and gently. "When the cremation is over, inform Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī and my relatives." He spoke quietly and in short sentences. Then he lay still in meditation, and I didn't know how to say anything because Mr. Kilesa had already come out in tears. I turned my head and looked over at Khrū Bā Wan, and Khrū Bā Wan looked over at me, and our eyes met. But each of us sat quietly by ourselves. After a while, Luang Pū very gently said, "Take the fire away and let it go out because I'm already quite warm. Then go and rest. I want to rest alone for a while." And then we quietly put our things away. We made no disturbing clatter whatsoever. Then we bowed and descended the stairs together.

Khrū Bā Wan went into his kuṭi. I didn't go to my kuṭi yet, but instead looked over at Phra Ācān Mahā's kuṭi. I saw that he was resting as usual, and so I went over to him and bowed. With my hands in añjali, I asked to be allowed to report, "Today, Master Luang Pū said to me, 'When I die, hurry up, burn [my body] quickly, nah!' He spoke softly and gently. 'When the cremation is over, inform Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī and my relatives.' Then he lay quietly in meditation. After a while he told me to take the fire away because he was already warm. Then he sent us down the stairs because he wanted to rest alone for a while. That's all. We put our things away neatly and went downstairs, Khrū Bā Wan and me. We hadn't spoken to each other, but rather each of us had sat there in silence. We had just looked at each other in silence, if I may say so."

Phra Ācān Mahā asked, "When Luang Pū gave you this instruction, where were you?" Answer: "I was watching the fire, very close to Luang Pū's bed, at about the height of Luang Pū's knees." The Venerable Ācān Mahā asked further, "How far away was Than Wan, and what was he doing at the time?" Answer: "Khrū Bā Wan was a little more than an arm's length away and was quietly occupied with preparing medicines."

The Venerable Ācān Mahā asked further, "Did Than Wan hear that too or not?" Answer: "He heard it. I turned my head towards

Khrū Bā Wan and our eyes met, but Khrū Bā Wan said nothing. I didn't say anything either, we were both silent. Was Luang Pū's instruction really meant like that, or how should it be understood, with all due respect?"

Phra Ācān Mahā replied, "That was absolutely what he meant." I continued, "If he really meant it that way, then perhaps he had given me this instruction so that I could pass on the details to Khrū Bā Wan, because Khrū Bā Wan was sitting further away from Master Luang Pūang than I was, as I am a monk of low monastic age. And that's why he didn't bother Phra Ācān Mahā, who is a great and important monk, if I may say so."

Phra Ācān Mahā replied, "It's not like that at all. The master certainly saw that he had a junior monk in front of him, but one who was a little more mature in years and who was also willing to approach him. [He thought:] 'I don't have to say much now. If I wanted to talk to a senior monk, it would turn into a long conversation. He will pass on these words and convey them to a senior monk because he is a person with concern.' That was just the introduction to the pulpit, Lā. Tomorrow he will speak louder and let everyone in the monastic community hear it. That's a sure thing!"

The next day after the meal, everyone in the monastery went up to him and he began to speak in a loud voice, explaining everything at length and in detail, just as Phra Ācān Mahā had presumed. He had made no mistake about that. Master Luang Pū said, "If you keep my body for a long time, it will be a nerve-wracking situation, a disturbance to your seclusion. Instead, it will turn your seclusion into a commotion, and many animals will have to die for it. Even in the case of the Blessed One, it was only seven days before he was cremated. The Malla rulers had tried to light the fire as early as the third day, but [the pyre] couldn't be set alight because the devas wouldn't allow it. They were waiting for the Venerable Mahā-Kassapa, who was on his way, together with 500 bhikkhus. I here am merely the dust on the Blessed One's feet, the dirt under his fingernails. If you keep my corpse and wait for the Venerable Mahā-Kassapa, there will only be the stench of decay." And so it went on and continued.

I was in no doubt that when it came to burial duties, Master Luang Pū didn't make even the slightest demands, because I saw this with my own eyes, with my own heart, with all my heart. And there were other important witnesses, namely Phra Ācān Niam with eighteen rains and Phra Ācān Sõ with no less than nine rains – two corpses in one and the same year. They were both cremated on the day they drew their last breath.

It was one thing for Luang Pū to want to burn the bodies of his students in this way. He expected his body to be treated in the same way, but that was quite another matter and would prove impossible. It was a matter of the surviving relatives who took their time in keeping [the body] because they had a building project in mind, an Uposatha hall as a place of worship – in a material sense, to impress the population, people with materialistic attitudes.[183] So the monks of the practice tradition have changed and to this day they are more concerned about building Uposatha halls. Oh dear!

Radio, refrigerator, television

One subject that I should put in writing so that it can be reflected upon is this: Luang Pū Mun was so strongly opposed to having a kitchen to prepare food in the monastery as a permanent feature. He quoted from the Vinaya again and again about what the Buddha had allowed in times when food was scarce. At one time in the city of Vesālī, there wasn't even enough rice on the alms round to fill one's stomach, let alone any other kinds of food. But these extra dishes are now the issue. At the time of the Buddha, if there was enough rice to fill you up every day, then that was considered sufficient to be able to practise. It wasn't considered a shortage as it is today.

Tongue and taste have been elevated to idol status. When a monastery has a large kitchen and a generous daily budget at its disposal, then this is a climate in which the kilesas thrive. Their slaves like it very much. And if there is also milk with Ovaltine before the alms round, the slaves like that even more. During the day, there are a few snacks before the sun reaches its peak. Aah, that's

even better! There are water taps everywhere. No need to scoop water. Television, radio, fridge, fan, newspapers like "The Sun" and "The Times"[184] – you name it, the slaves know all about these things. The names and addresses of influential people in great detail, and of wealthy people too.

"I know all about it, I'm not stupid! Nobody needs to boast in front of me. I hardly ever eat in the monastery. They line up to take me out to eat. So pathetic the way you go for alms, but of course there are also people here and there who throw something into your bowl. Some days it's enough to eat, some days there's an empty hole in your stomach. For my journeys in all the directions of the compass, I have the necessary flight connections, trains and coaches at my disposal."

These things can already be found in the Dhammapada,[185] the verses of Dhamma from the time of the Buddha. The kammaṭṭhāna scene today probably follows the lines described above. With the Khrū Ācāns [on the other hand], who are on the side of the causes – which the master had so perfectly and completely provided – the effects on the side of receiving come by themselves. The Venerable Luang Pū consumed according to the motto "little, little" and never lost self-control. Those who don't have the slightest idea about this "let the monkey loose", push their wishes onto others, want gain and recognition from them, and hand out praise in return like a Khrū Bā Ācān. Oh yes, and when they do find time to go off into seclusion, it just turns into drifting around in confusion. They drift around and preach their sermons to impress others. How they themselves are inside is completely irrelevant. The majority are actually like that. The horns of the cow and [in comparison] the hair of the cow.[186] [How many exceptions] there are is beyond the reach of experience and is incalculable. I have to write a few things about this, also as a means of self-instruction. It protects against forgetting oneself, forgetting the heart, forgetting Dhamma. It is of course impossible that this writing will please everyone all over the world.

I will now return with the story to the beginning of Luang Pū's illness, to an important point in his anāgataṁsañāṇa, his knowledge

of the future. The Venerable Luang Pū had uttered the following words, "My last breath will take place this year. Some monks will "let the monkey loose", push their way to the front and fight over [my] bones. And they will no longer be concerned with the practice. They will claim that they have heard it this way, that they were so close to me. Then they will become estranged from each other, no longer remaining close. It will be enough for them to talk about external matters. When it comes to internal matters, the different camps will see each other as having overtightened the screw."

I heard this with my own ears again and again before the meal. The master liked to give this speech for six or seven days in a row as the occasion presented itself. He went on to say, "When Phra Ācān Sao's life span had expired,[187] some monks fought over his bones. Some of them had the bones ground up and modelled Buddha figures out of them as amulets and magical objects. I could say quite a bit more about this. But I do insist that you don't take any away. We are not dogs fighting over bones! Among those of you who are with me now, there are those with good intentions and there are those who "let the monkey loose" and overtighten the screw in the future. If I were to say any more about it, it would become tiresome. If I were not to say anything, it would seem as if I didn't know anything about the future. And then nobody would dare to say anything."

The disciples who had heard this put their heads together when Luang Pū was not present and whispered, "If anyone here hasn't heard this talk with open ears, then there's no point in their staying with the master any longer. After all, he has been giving this talk again and again for six or seven days now." I considered his words quietly to myself, but thought: "If any monk should deviate even a little from the truth in this matter, then I will see it if I am still alive – me and others too." The final kammic result of such a thing is …, but I dare not write it down because …

There is another point. Master Luang Pū didn't readily accept candidates for ordination. He didn't accept an ordination when a point in time had already been set for disrobing. There was no disrobing in the samnak at all. If any monks or novices in the monas-

tery talked about disrobing or talked about worldly topics in order to lose themselves in them, Luang Pū knew about it; he sent them away and didn't let them stay with him anymore.

When two monks argued with each other in the samnak, he sent them both away because the master believed that a place of meditation practice was not a place for quarrelling. It was not a court where hearings take place. He left the adjudication of disputes to the administrative theras and the scholars. And that was it. Some matters, some cases, were settled on the spot, but they were really so few and far between that he took it upon himself to deal with them.

I believe that this was a good approach, because every name, every form, every party, every group should refrain from forming factions and from quarrelling. Everyone should be courteous to each other for the good of all. If something is wrong, then it should be settled for mutual benefit through reasonable dialogue, not in anger and with accusations thrown towards one another. No one should push themselves to the forefront all full of self-righteousness, because having Dhamma in mind, having peace and tranquillity in mind, is the main thing. Master Luang Pū followed a brilliant and profound course of action, both directly and indirectly. He taught his children and grandchildren in an ingenious way.

Luang Pū Lā's vow

Master Luang Pū preached all manner of things, all kinds of guidelines that had to do with being straightforward and not uptight, not demanding and not ambitious, not complacent and not lazy. And not conceited: even with 25 rains, it was not the done thing to leave the alms bowl for others to wash as a routine task. One should do it oneself and not take a monk, novice or anāgārika as an attendant. This point was so important that I need to put it down in writing. Nowadays, most practice monks are probably the exact opposite. As for me, when I had 15 rains behind me, I sometimes had someone who washed my bowl. As for scooping washing water and drinking water – carrying it on a pole, in pairs or alone,

or by hand[188] – I was still joining in doing that after 18 rains. It was essential because back then we were dependent on rainwater, which we channelled from the roofs into tanks and then tapped from the higher tanks before bringing it to lower places.[189] Even with the spittoon, which I regularly make ready for myself at night, my children and grandchildren have no monopoly on rinsing it for me. Sometimes I do beat them to the washing up. But I don't blame my children and grandchildren for that. I mean, I used to do it myself in the past anyway, and it's in my character. It is also a means of combating complacency as a thera and at the same time a way to divide up the workload and take the burden off the children and grandchildren. I stopped taking part in the sweeping of the monastery grounds when I was over 70. I wouldn't be on time to join the monks and novices because I am sometimes talking to guests. If I wanted to point this out to them and grumble a bit[190] – well, I don't have enough kammic potential for that and I'm afraid they might take revenge.

And sometimes my hernia hangs out. But it can be stuffed back in if I lie on my back in an inclined position, then stuff the hernia back in with my knees and then fix it with a cobra-head hernia band. And then I can go and sweep the monastery grounds, but it's a bit time-consuming. If I leave [the hernia band] on all day and all night, it's not so favourable for breathing. The suffering is merely displaced.

This hernia became really troublesome from 1979 onwards, when I was 68 and had 34 rains. All the medicinal plants and herbal remedies had done nothing. And there was a whole host of trusted people with mettā who tried to persuade me to have an operation. And I thanked them all very much for their good intentions every time, but when I consider my own motives, I see more of the disadvantages in doing this, namely:

a) My place is in the forest, in the wilderness; a fancy hospital is not the right place for me. And on top of that, it becomes problematic for others who have to join me to look after me. And I also have problems with my heart.

b) Because I live in the forest, on the mountain, I'm not particularly well connected. Up the mountain, down the river, Luang Ear, the Venerable Grandpa Eye[191] with his ugly dark robe has no influence and no potential. But he considers himself someone who is absolutely hell-bent on practising in the forest and on the mountain. When hindrances arise – in the form of illness, when the temples turn grey, the muscles shrivel, the face wrinkles, when half the nut no longer sprouts a dignified head of hair – should I be overnighting in a hospital and be in the way of mankind? And in terms of age, the time [for an operation] is also over. This point in particular stands out as being a disadvantage. There is no court of appeal for me.

c) So, when I realised this, I solemnly decided and vowed not to let anyone snip around at me and under no circumstances would I allow myself to be cut open in hospital. I will leave the cutting up [of my corpse] to Doctor Pyre. This will then be at the discretion of the surviving relatives. If they prefer to bury me, that's up to them. But it's hard to dig on the mountain, there are stones in the way everywhere.

This raises the question: Why do I take the story of Luang Pū Mun and Phra Ācān Mahā Bua and mix it with my own biography at my own discretion? Can't I just stick to my own story? Answer: No, I can't, because otherwise I wouldn't be doing justice to that era. Besides, I already wrote about it at the beginning. It would be like the crow grasping a mountain of gold, which can't just be the story of the crow. It also needs to tell the story of the mountain of gold. Because the mountain of gold is incomparably more valuable than the crow. Normally, no one asks about the crow. It caws and proclaims itself: "Caw, caw, caw, caw!" That's the way it is. Dear impermanence!

And there is also a proverb from ancient times. It comes from "Miscellaneous matters from the time of Rāma VI, Volume 3".[192] I offer it here as food for thought: "Rightly rolled rubber radiates richly. Outside so light like some cotton flock. Inside as black as a crow's feather frock." Some flowers bloom beautifully but are not fragrant. Some flowers bloom beautifully and are fragrant. Some are

not beautiful but are fragrant. Some are not beautiful and are not fragrant. It's possible that a large tree may have no heartwood at all. Or that a large tree does have heartwood. A tree can be small and have no heartwood. And a tree can be small and still have heartwood. Good things are useful to those who know how to use them well.

A bantam rooster searched around for food and then he found
a diamond on the ground, such value, beauty to enthral.
And with his call, he made it clear, he fully understood:
"Well, should my owner see me so, he'd lock me up, he would.
I'll have to stay stuck in a basket made of woven cane,
just like before. Oh, please no more. For me there is no gain."
Quite rightly so, the little bantam called out clear and sure.
Then he ran off and looked for food in this place here no more.

Like those who meet the precious teaching, which the Buddha taught,
but with the thought that nothing special in it can be found.
Well, they are drowned in all doctrines that they have had before,
just surely wasting time, lost chances, profiting no more.

They cannot see what they have lost by having gone astray.
Their kamma shapes, decides, decrees and has the final say.
Their cockiness so great, they think: "Ah, good enough am I!"
But all are subject to the world and end up in the mire.

And there of course they wallow, hollow madness does ferment.
The heart's defilements too frequent this mire, it is so said.
This mire, however, has an edge, and sotāpannas leave.
Just they achieve, apart from them, no certainty we find.

The workshop of all blindness is the only certainty.
So we must find our way out from delusion, get it straight.
For from this state one can't escape, when seeing wrong as right;
and sticking tightly to one's nature, path misunderstood.

The one who's aiming for the good, wants worldliness to end,
they cannot bend or change the precepts, leave them to decay.
So may you banish all your vices, end them all with haste!
And please don't waste your day, your life – it soon will slip away.

As long as we are vital, strong, the practice comes with ease.
When it gets shallow when we breathe, our body's strength will drop.
And without stop our time runs out, like seed of sesame –
so small it is. If suddenly the breathing's getting tough,
the body will revolt, and rough becomes the breathing out;
will flow about no longer freely, chest is tightly bound
around completely. Upwards wind will split your head in pain,
it's too much strain to bear, you'll be aware that death is sure.

With mindfulness and wisdom too, you're ripe to meditate!
When in a state of insight pure, it's time to make a move
to break away, cut worldly longing. There's no time to lose.
So, strive for deepest truth, Nibbāna, which has nothing left.

Nibbāna's depth can't be described, it's vast and so profound.
It can't be found as long as there is longing all around,
when bound with longing for the world of future and of past,
and for the present too, enthralled by all that cannot last.

The world of past – this is the knower, who has now gone by.
The future world – the knower too, who has not yet arrived.
The present world – again the knower, who is still around.
Together bound are past and future worlds, are here and now,
see how they come together here in present knower's world.

Don't lose yourself in doubt. Such aimless search can't liberate;
this state just leads to kamma and its fruit: they circle round
and round each other, like a snake which eats up its own tail.
A game to fail, a foolish play with shadows of our own,
there is no rest, and no beginning, nor an end to go.
Don't be conceited, don't indulge and do not be attached!

Refrain from poking all around! From ransacking refrain!
No use imposing ransoms. And leave blackmail right alone!
Pay it all in, and give it back, right to the one who knows.
And pull out sharpest super-wisdom, super-mindfulness,
to guess no more nor to assume, now you can go on down
the path to super-*paccattaṁ* – the last and greatest crown.

The light is nearing its end

I'll now return with the story to Luang Pū Mun, for whom the signs of the advancing ageing process were now becoming increasingly evident. The leading Khrū Bā Ācāns, who had spent the rains retreat scattered in various directions, different provinces, districts and municipalities, arrived at Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue after the rains retreat, one by one, and expressed their respective views and intentions.

In the first half of November 1949, we had Phra Ācān Thet[193] – now Luang Pū Thet – who at that time was staying in Khao Nõi, Thā Chalaeb, Canthaburī province. Then there was Luang Pū Õn, who was then staying in Wat Pā Bān Nõng Dohk, Phaṇṇānikhom district, Sakon Nakhõn province. There was also Luang Pū Fan, who was staying at Wat Pā Dhātu Nā Wehng, known as Wat Phū Thõnphithak, Dist. of the provincial capital, Prov. Sakon Nakhõn. We then had Phra Ācān Kongmā or Luang Pū Kongmā, who was staying at Wat Dõi Dhammacedī, where construction work had recently begun but hadn't progressed very much. He went to Bān Sī Nuan for alms, but he travelled back and forth between that monastery and Wat Pā Bān Khohk, which had been his old monastery. It had been incorporated into the district of the provincial capital Sakon Nakhõn.

There was Phra Ācān Kū, also called Luang Pū Kū, who was staying at Wat Pā Bān Khohk Manão, Dist. Phaṇṇnikhom, Prov. Sakon Nakhõn. Then we had Phra Ācān Mahā Thõngsuk from Wat Pā Suddhāvās, Dist. of the provincial capital, Prov. Sakon Nakhõn. At that time Luang Pū Mun had the monks of Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue registered at Wat Pā Suddhāvās.[194]

There was Phra Ācān Sīho, who was staying in Nakhõn Rāchasīmā at the time, but I don't remember any more at exactly which monastery that was. And there was Phra Ācān Kwā[195] who was staying in Bān Nā Hua Chāng, Dist. Phaṇṇānikhom, Prov. Sakhon Nakhõn at the time.

I would like it to be understood that whether it was Phra Ācān Kū or Phra Ācān Kwā or Phra Ācān Fan they all came from the

same stable and were closely connected to each other, but Phra Ācān Kū stood above Phra Ācān Fan in terms of monastic age. His life ended just one rains after that of Luang Pū Mun.

We had Phra Ācān Viriyang, who at that time was dividing his time between a forest monastery in Khlung district, Prov. Canthaburī and Wat Pā Kong Sī Rai, also in Khlung district. I am writing all this down for documentation purposes.

The monastery is falling apart

When those monastic elders, each of them full of faith, met at Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue in the time following the end of the rains retreat in 1949, as already reported, Luang Pū Mun's condition deteriorated dramatically due to his age and illness, and so they discussed the situation. Luang Pū Kongmā argued strongly and repeatedly that Luang Pū Mun should be persuaded to recuperate in the seclusion of Wat Pā Bān Muang Khai. Luang Pū Thet, Luang Pū Õn, Luang Pū Fan, Phra Ācān Kū, Phra Ācān Mahā Thõngsuk, Phra Ācān Mahā Bua, Phra Ācān Kwā were not so insistent and preferred to humbly try and find out what Luang Pū Mun himself thought was right. But they didn't oppose Luang Pū Kongmā too much either. A decision was made, and it was accepted by Luang Pū to proceed as required.

The following morning, we went on alms round very early, and after the meal we hurriedly got ready. The disciples of Luang Pū Mun, who had requested nissaya from him, divided up into two groups. One group was to set off immediately. This group was mainly made up of those who had to fulfil necessary, indispensable tasks in connection with Luang Pū. Three monks were to go immediately: Khrū Bā Wan, myself and Khuṇ Sīhā. Phra Ācān Mahā Bua and Luang Tā Thõngyū had to lead the group that was made up of those who had remained behind for the time being because the robe-making work hadn't yet progressed very far due to a number of incidents and emergencies.

The monastery was falling apart. The various Phra Ācāns, who had come together from all directions, marched off together with the advance guard, quietly and without speaking. At nine o'clock in

the morning, we set off, carrying Luang Pū on a stretcher – there were about 200 lay people and monks altogether. We carried him on a cart path past Nõng Phue village, step by step further and further west until we turned right, headed straight towards Phaṇṇānikhom district. Oh impermanence! The village of Nõng Phue sank into mourning and tears flowed because the Venerable Luang Pū, their patron saint, was being taken far away from their village. Many wept and sobbed as if the whole village was being led to the slaughter.

About two kilometres past the village of Nõng Phue, Luang Pū said calmly, "Well, which cremation site are you carrying me to?" I was very close by, I didn't move from the carrying pole at Luang Pū's feet, having squeezed myself in front of the lay people. When I heard Luang Pū's soft murmur as he spoke with his eyes closed, I, old deluded fool, was seized with emotion, and sadness welled up. Tears streamed down both cheeks, and even in front of 100 lay people and another 100 monks I didn't feel ashamed.

Where were all the Khrū Bā Ācāns, Khrū Bā Wan and Khuṇ Sīhā at that very moment? Khrū Bā Wan and Khuṇ Sīhā each had a water bottle around their necks and were walking in front of the stretcher a little more than ten arm spans ahead. A bit further in front of the stretcher all the Khrū Bā Ācāns were walking in order of seniority. Behind the stretcher [lay people] walked in a long line, followed by a group with the cart with materials. Lay people had already hung the bowl and all other requisites [of Luang Pū Mun] over their shoulders.

I had squeezed myself between the lay people and was able to be very close to the carrying pole. But I hadn't shouldered the carrying pole at all! I just used my right hand to grasp it, leaning sideways in front of a lay man who was shouldering the load. Some used a knotted cloth as a sling; some used only one hand because there were so many carriers. In some places the stretcher had to be lowered, in other places it had to be raised because the terrain was so uneven. In places where the grass was only shin high or knee high, it had been completely flattened because it had been trampled down by so many people.

The author, master of the defilements, master of tears, was at his wits' end. I hadn't put on any shoes because I didn't think it was appropriate for me to do so when getting close to Luang Pū. I didn't care if the lay people wanted to put on shoes or not, I conceded that that was their business. Some wore shoes, others didn't. And after all, there were thorns in some spots. Everyone had to take care themselves not to step on them.

When we had walked quite some distance, we stopped in order to drink some water. Luang Pū took two or three sips. He was lying on his right side on the parked stretcher. I was quite shaken and worried.

We rested for about 10-15 minutes and then walked on until we came to a rice field. The path was muddy and difficult to pass, and nightfall was approaching. There was no other way to go except right through these people's paddy field. Their rice was ready to harvest. They had faith, tore down the fencing for us, and let us trample through their rice. More than 200 people marched right through the rice to the other end of their rice field. This meant we could take a shortcut to a path that led us out of the mud. As for the rice, it was flattened, uprooted and snapped off. These people's act can surely be seen as a spontaneous manifestation of their faith, which, through such a noble attitude, enabled us to overcome the problem that lay before us. It's hard to find something like that these days. The rice was standing tall, the grains were already ripe. At least 600 kilograms of rice were lost!

[This noble attitude] could be seen as being Luang Pū's merit, as an embodied miracle. One might well be impressed by someone who can dive into the earth or fly and then think they are great, but in that case, birds would be performing miracles every day and would be great every day. The same would apply to earthworms and eels. For example. They dive into the earth every day, perform a miracle every day and are great every day, but they don't think anything of it.

Saranaṁ gacchāmi, because I don't attach any importance to these things. All that matters is whether the defilements become less, weaker, thinner, whether they dry up. Only a correct khõ wat

and a correct practice are important. Most people are fascinated by miracles such as being able to dive into the earth and fly. But I want to conclude this topic by stating once and for all that the miracle of the teaching, the Buddha's teaching, is a miracle that never becomes stale and that is applicable at all times to the beings of the world with their humans, devas, māras and brahmas who inhabit a heap of form and mental factors, and which doesn't disappear anywhere, namely: kamma and the result of kamma. This is a miracle that is already present in every attitude of the mind. Good action leads to good, bad action leads to bad. This is already there.

Even if one wanted to look for miracles elsewhere, it gets hot when one reaches into the fire. If one doesn't reach into the fire, then it won't get hot. All this is already a miracle and so it has one and the same meaning as kamma and the result of kamma. If we believe in kamma and the result of kamma, then we believe in miracles, then we also believe in Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. That's how it is.

Now back to the report on Luang Pū. While we were passing through these people's rice field, the mahātheras were discussing so, "We shouldn't take Luang Pū to Muang Khai because the monastery there has been abandoned for several years. The trees a very densely packed, the air is not fresh. And it will soon be dark. And Luang Pū's condition is getting worse because the rocking while carrying him over hill and dale, forest and meadow is weakening him." So, they decided to make a detour to Bān Kud Kõm (also known as Dong Phū), where Phra Ācān Kū's monastery was located. When we arrived there shortly after 7 pm, Luang Pū's condition had deteriorated dramatically.

The next morning, he felt a little better. After the meal, there was a monk who wanted to saw a hole in the planks of the sālā floor near Luang Pū's sickbed so that he could excrete through the hole. Luang Pū said in a loud voice, "Leave it alone! Than Lā takes care of such matters. The way you are doing it is not what he wants." I heard that and the old fool cried again. The tears flowed, and I was not ashamed of it in front of anyone, because I reflected in my heart: "I have been serving Master Luang Pū in every way

and to the best of my ability for more than four years now. Luang Pū is certainly not worried that I might only be serving him to gain prestige. He also has no doubt that I might serve him without respect. He knows that my actions are in line with my motivation. Master Luang Pū recognises my heart correctly and without error." As soon as I had these thoughts, the fool-tears suddenly started dripping again.

About an hour later, I borrowed a foxtail saw and a chisel. I bowed at the feet of Master Luang Pū and asked permission to be of service. Then I proceeded in a way that wouldn't inconvenience him. I inserted a support post from underneath. Then I drilled downwards with the chisel until the saw fitted through. Because I had a sharp saw at my disposal, I was finished after about five minutes. Then I looked for a really big tub for underneath and lined it thickly with ash. When it was time to get it clean, I used my hands to scoop [the faeces] out and then threw it into a pit. Then I quickly washed my hands clean with paraffin and ash. There were a number of people who wanted to bring me a scoop, but I didn't give in to their wishes because I had been used to doing this for several years as a khõ wat. During the time when we were still in Nõng Phue, people were competing to do this, but Luang Pū Mahā didn't allow them, as he was afraid that Luang Pū Mun would not be satisfied with it and wouldn't trust [the others] to do it, and because he was afraid that Luang Pū Mun could find out that one or the other wasn't practising it right down to chilli and ginger and was already tired of it, and he would then have to pass the task on to another monk. That would have been a waste of time. The only exception was when I was ill and bedridden, thus preventing me from going. If I've already said this, then I'll just say it again.

While we were resting at Wat Pā Kud Kõm and taking care of Master Luang Pū, Khrū Bā Wan and I didn't go on alms round at all because the group of theras and anutheras[196] didn't allow it. They only let us quickly take our alms bowls down to the eating sālā and place them there. The saṅgha filled the bowls after returning from the alms round, and I ate later, after the community. Khrū Bā Wan went down beforehand and ate with the community, he just didn't go on the alms round. As soon as Khrū Bā Wan had finished eating,

he came up and relieved me. But I was content with that and didn't worry about it, because our father, our grandfather, was worth more to us than the daily meal in our bellies.

During the time that we stayed in the forest around Kud Kõm, i.e. in Bān Phū or in the Bān Phū jungle – there were a number of names – we were joined by more and more monastic elders, namely Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī from Udõn, Phra Ācān Sīlā from Wat Pā Bān Wā, Dist. Wānõnnivās, Prov. Sakon Nakhõn, together with 40 monks and novices who stayed for three nights. Phra Ācān Mahā Bua had also abandoned Bān Nõng Phue, as had several members of the monastic community there, coming from Bān Nõng Phue one after the other. After eleven days, Khrū Bā Thõngkham arrived with a further group. Only Luang Tā Thõngyū stayed behind. Luang Pū Mun's illness was getting worse and worse.

In the morning, after the eleventh night, a group led by a chief doctor from Sakon Nakhõn arrived. They bowed at the feet of Luang Pū and implored him, "We request that we be allowed to take Luang Pū to Wat Pā Suddhāvās." They pleaded with him three or four times in a row.

Luang Pū said, "Oh yes, corpses are carried to the charnel ground. They cast them off there. No one has ever carried one back. And now it's my turn." Luang Pū continued, "If we go there, it will create new problems because so many disciples of mine, both old and new, have already come here from all directions, over forty people already." They said respectfully, "It doesn't matter how many there are. We'll simply use passenger transport vehicles for them." In reality, there were only two or three buses plying the route from Sakon Nakhõn to Udõn at the time, and that included the road department vehicle, and the road was rocky, potholed and bumpy, not good at all.

Then they pleaded at Luang Pū's feet for him to eat something. He was able to sit up to eat without help. He took about five or six sips of watery food with the help of a spoon. Following this, the head doctor gave him an injection of sleep-inducing medication after having asked for permission four or five times, and Luang Pū had finally and reluctantly consented.[197]

The departure was a rather rushed affair. The fool with the defilements was already crying his fool's defilement tears again. Then we carried Luang Pū across the field on the stretcher. He lay on his right side with one foot on top of the other as we walked towards the road. It was about a kilometre to reach the road. We lifted Luang Pū into the road department vehicle. He lay in front of Khrū Bā Wan, Ācān Viriyang, me and Khuṇ Sīhā. We were travelling at the head of a convoy. Luang Pū lay there quietly, completely motionless. All that could now be discerned was his very, very faint breath.

When we arrived at Wat Pā Suddhāvās, we carried Luang Pū into a special kuṭi with a verandah on all four sides, a wooden ceiling, walls made out of wood, two doors to the sleeping room and real windows. The verandah had railings all the way around. The sleeping room was about three metres across. The outside verandah was two and a half metres wide on three sides and about four to five metres wide at the front. Because it was a kuṭi with two rooms, there was a verandah on all four sides. One of the rooms was designated as a sleeping room.

The Khrū Bā Ācāns from all directions crowded in front of it. Luang Pū Singh from Khorāt, Luang Pū Bunlāy, Luang Pū Sān, Phra Ācān Koeng, Phra Ācān Sim and many young monks and novices of the practice tradition came for a while, one after the other. I can't even name them all.[198]

No more shade under the crystal Bodhi tree

And then we brought Luang Pū into the room and laid him on his right side. Around 6 pm, Luang Pū Kongmā said, "Than Thŏngkham, Than Lā and Than Sīhā, you have worn yourselves out completely and have been totally exhausted for a long time. So, when night falls, go and have a quick lie down on the verandah. Phra Ācān Fan and I will take care of Luang Pū in the room. Than Wan is already resting in a kuṭi with Than Viriyang and Than Net. Than Mahā Bua is spending the night under a tree in the monastery. He

is going the extra mile to stay awake because he fears that Luang Pū might die before [he wakes up]."

As soon as he had finished speaking, we spread out our robes on the verandah floorboards, bowed three times, took the bundled saṅghāṭi as a headrest and focussed our attention on the in- and out-breaths. But our eyes were clear and wide awake because we had long since become used to being sleep deprived. The amount of food I had been eating every day [lately] was the equivalent of a duck egg, eaten with difficulty and completely free of appetite. My years of life had reached more than more than thirty. Oh impermanence!

Shortly after one o'clock in the morning, Luang Pū Kongmā pulled on my arm and whispered, "Get up, get up! The Great Ācān is about to breathe his last." I whispered back, "I haven't been asleep yet!" He told me to quickly inform Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī, as well as Phra Ācān Singh, Phra Ācān Thet, Phra Ācān Mahā and Khrū Bā Wan. I quickly went first to Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī's kuṭi. When I got there, I said, "I respectfully request to inform Your Eminence that Luang Pū is very unwell." – "Yes, I'll come immediately." Then I went to wake Phra Ācān Singh and Phra Ācān Thet, "With respect, honourable masters, the Great Master is unwell to the point of being at the limit of what is bearable." – "Understood! We haven't really slept yet." Then I went to wake Phra Ācān Mahā Bua. As I was approaching his place under the tree, he already asked, "Who's there?" I replied, "It's me. Things are getting hefty for the Great Master." Then I walked past him to see Ācān Wan, but Khuṇ Sīhā had already informed him.

Then I hurried up because I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to be at Luang Pū's side in time. Then Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī said, "We [dignitaries] will stay on the verandah and give precedence to the disciples who have sacrificed themselves in service to the Great Master. They have the right to watch him go. The room is quite cramped. It wouldn't be right if we were to force our way in." It was decided that six monks should be present in Luang Pū's room to witness his last breath – including Luang Pū Fan, that made seven.

Luang Pū Fan, however, was sitting behind Phra Ācān Kongmā, about an arm's length away from Luang Pū Mun, and facing the Great Master. Luang Pū Fan sat silently in a meditation posture. Then in turn the following monks sat around Luang Pū Mun, about a hand span away from his body: Phra Ācān Kongmā sat to the right of Luang Pū – who was lying at a slant on his right side – sitting at the level of Luang Pū's shoulder. Phra Ācān Mahā Bua sat at the level of Luang Pū's waist. I sat at his feet, together with Than Sīhā. Khrū Bā Thõngkham sat at the level of his knees behind Luang Pū. Khrū Bā Wan sat next to him, between Luang Pū's waist and chest. Everyone sat quietly and followed his breathing. After about 20 minutes, he very calmly stopped breathing. Then this fool here burst into tears again like a madman; the tears poured out at the command of the heart.

It must have been after two o'clock in the morning when the people in the city received the news, and they started arriving after three o'clock. So, Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī said, "We monks will leave the room now to make room for the lay followers so that through their viewing of Phra Ācān's corpse they can be moved to a sense of urgency by the sight." I dawdled a little as I descended. Then I saw a watch near Luang Pū's head. It was Luang Pū's watch. The thought suddenly occurred to me: "If this watch were to disappear, then there would be another problem because I had separated myself from the others and was the last to descend." After this thought, I put [the watch] into my shoulder bag for safekeeping, but first I raised my hands [in añjali] to my forehead. And then I hurriedly gave [the watch] to Phra Ācān Singh, also called Luang Pū Singh. When I had explained everything to him, he kept it.

Ah ... now I've missed out one part of the story. When the master had taken his last breath, I asked Phra Ācān Mahā for permission and raised my hands to my forehead once more. With both hands, I raised Luang Pū's chin so as to close [his mouth]. I held it in that position for about two or three minutes, and then the mouth stayed closed. I was afraid that the mouth wouldn't be able to be closed once he had become cold and stiff.

This raises the question: Why is he writing in such a mixed-up way? Does he want to go on like that all the way to Nibbāna?

I close my eyes and answer: It's the story of a guy who has been through the suffering experienced in saṁsāra in this very life. The Supreme Teacher and the noble disciples who practised the recollection of previous lives were so much better at remembering – there's just no comparison. From where we are now, how can we know much about anything? We can't even spit out as much as the saliva in the mouth of the Blessed One!

If I am obsessed with writing, I must first accept this obsession and follow it. As soon as I understand the downside of the obsession, I will then be able to recover from it. I also think to myself: it was an important period in the author's life. [Writing about it] is probably better than forging verses for songs and recitations that sound great in the worldly realm. If this isn't a principle to live by for the reader and listener, I'll content myself with the fact that it is a principle to live by for me. I'm of the view that I have no lack of capital for this, and no profit is lost because my heart is still firmly with the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, free of doubt and uncertainty. When I tell a lot, I know that I am telling a lot. When I tell little, I know that I am telling little. And I practise not getting tied up in either of these conditions. It has to be about developing insight. It has to be based on mindfulness and wisdom – that is exactly the right criterion.

To know much takes time, isn't easy.
We grieve, when knowledge seems too shallow.
Too narrow is this as a true gauge
because away the verse will take us.[199]

The Buddha knew so much, his vision
as such it was so clear and timeless.
Pure of mind too the noble students,
from humankind both men and women.

They reached the last goal, nothing more left,
the best, Nibbāna, like this was it
because it was their time – and all that
before my readers, listeners too.

A heart that has its dangers all learnt,
that, when it burns, the climate boils hot,
it's got the skills to ease and soothe too
and work on through the heart's hot topics.

A heart that doesn't know the climate of the heart doesn't know the climate of the Dhamma. A heart that doesn't know the way of the heart doesn't know the way of the Dhamma. A heart that doesn't know how to rely on the heart doesn't know how to rely on Dhamma. A heart that doesn't know the causes in the realm of the heart doesn't know the causes in the realm of Dhamma. A heart that doesn't know the extinction of causes in the realm of the heart doesn't know the extinction of causes in the realm of Dhamma. A heart that doesn't know liberation doesn't know the Dhamma of liberation. A heart that doesn't respect the heart doesn't respect the Dhamma. A heart that doesn't know the heart that it should treat with respect doesn't know the Dhamma that it should treat with respect. A heart that doesn't know the totality of the heart doesn't know the totality of the Dhamma. A heart that doesn't know the One Heart in the present doesn't know the One Dhamma in the present. Oh permanence! Oh impermanence!!

Continuing on with the topic of Luang Pū's corpse. When evening came that day, we bowed to the corpse and placed it in a wooden coffin, which at the time was considered a first-class coffin. Then he was laid out in the dining sāla. At 9 pm in the night, there were recitations: Dhammacakka, Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, Ādittapariyāya Sutta, Dhammaniyāma [Sutta, texts from the] *Abhidhamma**, round after round. And lay people and monks also listened to Dhamma talks together every night. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī was in charge. He organised the order in which all the theras took turns in giving the talk. But Phra Ācān Mahā was not yet among the speakers. At that time, he was fully immersed in his practice and had gone into seclusion alone. Once every seven days he came for a short visit. The monks came from all directions. On some days there were up to 800, on other days from 400 upwards, 500, 600, 700. No less than 400 was the minimum. There was an abundance of food for the entire three months. There was no theft, no one caused any trouble.

Seven days after a death, known as *sattamavāra*, tham bun would usually take place, but it ended up being done basically every day because there were so many monks present. If we take 600 as the daily average and multiply by 90, well, how many monks would that be? Well, that would be 54,000 monks! There were also quite a few of the mahātheras of the royal group[200] from Bangkok. Wat Pā Suddhāvās was a sprawling, secluded monastery back then because there were no plantations and no houses belonging to anyone. There was only jungle and tall forest. You could hang your klod and mosquito net wherever you wanted without crowding each other. I would like to make it clear that just a little over 30 years have passed since the end of Master Luang Pū Mun's life. The houses, the city, have all grown rampantly, haunting the monastery, so that it has now become a monastery within the city.

At the time of the Buddha 2524 years ago, there was Wat Jetavana, Wat Pubbārāma, Wat Veḷuvana, Wat Nigrodhārāma, the Kūṭāgāra Mahāvana Forest[201] – as examples. At the time of the Buddha, most monasteries were forest monasteries. And so, naturally, not only did the birth, the awakening, the proclamation of the dhammacakka, the parinibbāna and so on all take place in a forest of the highest order; the Buddha's teaching also deals with the forest, the jungle and the mountains, in both the instructions of the Vinaya and in the various discourses. Almost all discourses have something to do with the forest.

For those who have something against forest monasteries and mountain monasteries – in the story of the Venerable Meghiya [we learn] that they even built monasteries on mountain ridges and offered several places [like this] to the monks at the time of the Buddha. If we were to remove the forest and the mountains from the Pāli Canon, then it would no longer be complete. But we just run on blindly ahead and don't look back at all. All we care about is the map. If I have written anything here that is wrong, I ask all knowledgeable people for forgiveness and I am always prepared to listen to and consider any criticism respectfully because I only have good intentions.

After Luang Pū Mun's Parinibbāna (1949/50)

It doesn't matter if we are so quick-witted and can talk in such a way that the tears flow and the fire goes out – as long as there is no reduction within the realm of the defilements, as long as we cannot banish them, at least a little, from the nature of the khandhas, then we are like an empty bowl of water.

Phra Ācān Wan Uttamo

After Luang Pū Mun's parinibbāna

Planning committee for the cremation

I'll come back to the story now: the account of the deliberations on the cremation of the corpse. Two days after Luang Pū's last breath, Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī as the chief mahāthera of the community, various monastic elders from the saṅgha and a group of important lay followers met on the verandah-kuṭi where Luang Pū's end had occurred. His body had since been brought to the [main] sālā. The theras had agreed that Khrū Bā Thõngkham, Khuṇ Sīhā and I should continue to sleep on the verandah as before; for Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī had moved into the kuṭi, and the three of us were to attend to him until the cremation ceremonies were over. That's why I was able to sit nearby when the theras were discussing the cremation. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī took the floor:

"After four days, counting from the day of death, we should cremate the corpse, because the Venerable Phra Ācān had repeatedly impressed on his disciples that they should cremate a corpse as quickly as possible." I myself was also in favour of carrying out the cremation quickly because then everyone would have been free to go into seclusion again. There would then have been no need to worry too much about the material aspects of receiving guests. Laying a body out for a long time has more disadvantages than advantages. Even if a later ceremony were to bring in millions in donations, this wouldn't equal the blessing of quiet and the blessing of foregoing a social event. It doesn't equal the blessing of frugality. This was all the more true as these were monks of the practice tradition.

Having tricks and cunning, hooks and loops in store in order to pull money out of other people's pockets is, of course, inappropriate for those who are intent on escaping suffering in this life if they

have been ordained because their character is so inclined. This too can be applied to householders, for whom it can also be said: they give donations from time to time, they observe the precepts from time to time and they meditate from time to time. This way their character is moving on the right path.

The word "character" can be taken literally.[202] Behaviour on the right path is called good character. Behaviour on the bad path is called bad character. We can divide character into two types: worldly character and supramundane character. Supramundane character is character from stream-entry upwards. Below that, it is character that doesn't know its place. I understand it this way: behaviour that is full of determination that corresponds to this path, is of course a pull factor for those who have a wish to escape from suffering in this life, but for those who are content with their dwelling and hurrying by day and night just as it is, it signifies bad air.

Naturally, when a puthujjana, a worldling, dwells, they dwell in the world. When they hurry, they hurry in the wake of the world. Not so the stream-enterer: one who knows the way, the way of body, speech and mind. Whether they are dwelling or hurrying, they know the way of the heart. And so there can be no talk that they are dwelling or hurrying in the wide world, because they do not forget the essential, because they do not forget themselves, do not forget the heart, do not forget Dhamma, which is always the master of their heart.

Whether or not gain, fame, praise and glory come to us in the threefold world spheres, it doesn't matter if we are so quick-witted and can talk in such a way that the tears flow and the fire goes out – as long as there is no reduction within the realm of the defilements, as long as we cannot banish them, at least a little, from the nature of the khandhas, then we are like an empty water bowl. If we then imagine that we possess a refuge within ourselves, if we imagine that we are clever, then we are only lying to ourselves, we are just kidding ourselves. Not only do we castrate ourselves by being so out of our minds; when we finally come to our senses, it is already late, the twilight has already come. The twilight is death.

Distribution of Luang Pū Mun's requisites

I'll now return to the account of the distribution of Master Luang Pū's requisites. Seven days after Luang Pū's last breath, Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī convened a meeting of the saṅgha, including all the theras, closely packed together, and at which he presided. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī began to speak, "My dear Than Mahā Bua, from the group of those who were in a nissaya relationship with Phra Ācān at the time of his death, which monks from that group were particularly active in serving Phra Ācān?" Phra Ācān Mahā Bua informed him, "Than Wan, Than Thõngkham, Than Lā and Than Sīhā." He named them in order of seniority, according to rains. In reality, he should have named himself first. But Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī knew that anyway.

Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī said, "Lā, what do you want from Phra Ācān's requisites?" I don't quite know where the feeling of being deeply moved in the Dhamma at that moment came from, it welled up in me so that I was unable to speak. The tears were dripping down again so much that it was straight out embarrassing. I hid my face in a bathing cloth and after a while managed to regain my composure. And then I said, "I won't take any of it. The master gave us such an abundance of Dhamma and material things when he was still alive. These requisites here are things that Luang Pū used every day. I'm afraid it's demeritorious [if I take something from it] because my level doesn't do them justice in any way. And one day they will no longer move me to tears when I see them." He replied, "You should formally accept some of them from me first, in the spirit of correct procedure.[203] After that, you can pass them on to some other monk." I raised my hands to my forehead and then took something from his hand three times, using both my hands. The first time it was the thermos flask, the second time it was the shoulder bag, the third time it was the water cup.

When I received the thermos flask, I passed it respectfully on to Luang Pū Thet in full view of the assembled saṅgha. I actually wanted to give the shoulder bag to Luang Pū Fan in keeping with his rank, but while I was still handing Luang Pū Thet the thermos flask, some monk behind me said, as he pulled the shoulder bag

away, “Give me this bag, eh!” That’s how it was. (And he also took the water cup as well.) I don’t know which monk it was. I didn’t strain my neck to find out because there was such a crowd of monks around. But it was most likely someone from a different monastic community, not one of us. I was at peace with it though and felt no loss because my respect outweighed the loss.

Grief, respect, being deeply moved, loving devotion until the tears flow – all of these probably have one and the same taste. That I have felt no loss means something like: I have not felt any loss in relation to the master’s possessions, but I have missed his Dhamma – and that is something quite different, much deeper than those external things.

Luang Pū Mun’s bowl

Why, when distributing the requisites, did Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī ask me before all the other monks? He should have asked according to the number of rains in descending order. I can only assume that he had in mind to proceed according to the defilements of the master of tears. That could well be, because all the others had already left the tears far behind them through their meditation practice. This monk here was still the errand boy of tears who fell into hell while he was still on earth.

To conclude: Phra Ācān Mahā, Khrū Bā Wan, Khrū Bā Thõngkham and Khuṇ Sīhā did not want anything either.

As for the alms bowl, it was given to Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī who was in need of a bowl at that time. Phra Ācān Kongmā took the walking stick with him and passed it on to other monastic elders, who mostly kept it as a memento. When the museum for keeping the requisites had been built, Luang Pū Mahā Bua travelled around with Dr. Chow and requested that the various requisites such as the alms bowl and walking stick be brought back and kept in the museum. In this way, they became objects of veneration that belonged to the general public.

I remember the shape and features of the alms bowl very clearly, but the bowl I saw in the museum display case was not the same one that Luang Pū had used in the period before he passed away. The real bowl had probably been kept in a high attic[204] as it was a fired [iron] bowl of round, medium-sized design with a pure lustre. It was not a high bowl with a tapered rim and a small opening such as the one here [in the museum]. But one should also bear in mind that Luang Pū's life ended many years ago. We don't know if Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī hadn't used it continuously until it became full of holes. And the end of his life came several years before the start of the initiative to build a museum for the requisites. It is also quite possible that another monk took it into use afterwards without realising its significance.

But when, after a long, long time it was reclaimed, they simply took another bowl, probably just as a way of getting rid of a problem. As for the other requisites, there is no doubt [about their authenticity].[205] The doubt only relates to the bowl.

Anyway, there's no point in getting worked up about it. Let's just stay calm! Whatever things we think of as being Luang Pū Mun's requisites, if we honour and respect them and bow down to them, we will have the merits of it. We make Buddha statues out of wood, bricks, cement, steel, gold and glass, as a representation of the Supreme Teacher, as a monument to his qualities. And it is meritorious that we bow to them, raise our hands in añjali and contemplate them, as a nourishment of the mind, as an abode of the mind. All this is meritorious. If we see a cloud passing by in the sky and imagine, perhaps, that the Supreme Teacher is floating towards us, and we bow, we are making merit in the same way.

When we don't see external things at all, but rather only our own heart, our own mind, free from sensual thoughts, free from thoughts of ill-will, free from thoughts of cruelty, then this is something wholesome in the heart in an even more subtle way. It is the development of cittānupassanā, meditation that penetrates inwards.

When we no longer see objects, but only earth, water, fire, wind, as far as the threefold world spheres reach, both externally and internally, far and near, coarse and subtle, exquisite, also past,

also future, also present; when we see them as flat and uniform, like the surface of the victory drum, then we incorporate them into the meditation on the analysis of the form-khandha. This can play a part in alleviating, in reducing the fascination with earth, water, fire, wind. In this way we also ease the fascination with the casing of skin because the casing of skin is part of the earth element. If we are no longer fascinated by earth, water, fire and wind, then we already have the fascination with other more subtle things under control, under control of the heart, and victory is possible. When we recognise one thing clearly, then other things also gradually become possible. But if we fall for anything in the universe of the body, in the universe of the mind, then we allow ourselves to drift in delusion. Delusion then has power on the side of the defilements.

In the next section, we will turn to the topic of waiting for Master Luang Pū's funeral duties during the time when Luang Pū's body had not yet been consigned to the flames. I felt a great longing to withdraw into seclusion somewhere, and it didn't suit me at all. The hustle and bustle of the preparations for the ceremony that was brewing was becoming more and more intense. A sālā also had to be built, about fifteen metres long and about ten metres wide. Luang Pū Õn and Luang Pū Fan appointed me to build the upper parts, i.e. the ridge, the purlins and rafters, which had to be supported by rows of pillars because there were so many people, so many monks.[206] Oh impermanence! On top of that there was the lack of sleep, on top of that the lack of appetite, on top of that receiving monks, on top of that waiting on Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī, who was my upajjhāya, from all directions. In the realm of sitting meditation, it wasn't enough to take an oath on it. In the realm of walking meditation, all movement had ceased. I thought back to the qualities of Master Luang Pū, which were beyond measure, for he had decreed over and over again not to keep [his body] for long because he feared that it would prevent his children and grandchildren from developing samādhi. And he also feared that his children and grandchildren would use this as a precedent for keeping corpses for a long time in the future, as an opportunity to socialise. This can certainly be taken as anāgataṁsañāṇa, knowledge of things to come, for the Venerable One was not mistaken, for there

was plenty of chaos, bustle, socialising and activity. But people who like to have a good fun time will, in contrast, have found it entertaining. Those who love the tradition of the line of practice, on the other hand, will have found it inappropriate.

To bring everyone in the world under one roof has been incredibly difficult since time immemorial because [people's] minds and perspectives just cannot be on the same level. It's like the sun and moon; the sun orbits quickly; the moon orbits slowly. So, it is sometimes necessary to have incomplete half-months, and sometimes half-months that overshoot. And occasionally there are additional leap months. We therefore have a means at hand to prevent the faster one from rolling away, and can persuade the slower one to speed up a little. Without this, the seasons would deviate too much from the norm.[207]

In some areas of the Vinaya, too, there are special rules and concessions for newly ordained bhikkhus, for example for some [minor] dukkaṭa class offences, such as when one cannot yet put on one's robes properly and close them all the way round, or when while eating one drops rice into the bowl or onto the place where one is sitting.[208] But secretly and one-sidedly taking advantage of these concessions is not acceptable either. And if, for example, a bhikkhu is of unsound mind, then he is not to be held accountable for the offences he has committed during the period when he was of unsound mind, this is called amūḷhavinaya. For example. But if one wanted to rely solely on such concessions and special provisions, that wouldn't be possible either.

Whatever the case may be, a strict practitioner is naturally not satisfied with a slack practitioner. A slack practitioner is naturally the trigger for the dissatisfaction of a strict practitioner. But strictness on the right path is also to be praised. Strictness on the wrong path, outside the Dhamma, outside the Vinaya, there again we have a problem.

Strictness on the right path in this present age would have probably been considered still useable at the time of the Buddha. Practise sufficient for the midfield in the present age would have been almost usable at the time of the Buddha. If one considers one-

self to be somewhat slack in the present age of the current epoch, one would have probably been on a very poor level at the time of the Buddha. But in any case, if we are super or slack or middling or bad, we have to use Dhammavinaya as a measuring instrument and probe. Making decrees according to our own automatisms, with everyone doing their own thing, is simply not possible! Because we are largely taking sides with ourselves. If we take sides with Dhamma, we will hardly ever be wrong. And if we are wrong, then we are not very wrong, and the door is open to rectify it. The more a person has fat kilesas, the more they will take sides with themselves. An arahant takes sides with Dhamma fully because there is no more grasping to be found in the nature of their khandhas. For the kind of person who has attained the supramundane, Dhamma is naturally the main thing. They use it as a magnifying glass, a mirror, a straight edge, a measuring instrument, a measuring cup, a metre rule and a yardstick. It is impossible for them to use anything outside of it as a criterion.

On the day of the cremation

Next, I will report on the funeral duties for Master Luang Pū, because the topic is not yet closed. Time passed, and as the end of the third lunar month approached, Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī and the theras and anutheras prepared to consign Luang Pū's body to the flames, taking into account that all the Buddhists who wanted to go to *Phra Dhātu** Phanom for the annual monastery fair would still arrive in time for the festival if they left immediately after the cremation had finished. So, in order to not disrupt the travel plans of those who had to go there, it was agreed that the 13th day of the waxing moon in the third lunar month would be the day of the cremation.[209] It was agreed that the fire would be lit at 9 pm, but there were a few incorrigible people who started the fire before then without authorisation. Night had only just fallen, but it had already happened.

They got up early and picked out the bones after the breakfast break. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī announced, "If someone

secretly takes away bones for himself, then for monks this is considered a pārājika offence."[210]

The furnace for the cremation was in the shape of an Uposatha hall, the soil had been heaped up a metre high. The furnace stood in the centre and had holes on all four sides out of which the flames shot. The flames leapt upwards at a rapid pace.

After gathering up the bones, it was time for matikā, paṁsukūla, distribution of gifts according to custom, exactly the same programme as before the cremation. When everything was finished, Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī took the remainder up to the kuṭi verandah. The Venerable One asked me, "Lā, do you want some bone relics?" I said, "I don't want any, as Luang Pū Thet had raised this issue several times in Bān Nõng Phue before [Luang Pū Mun's] passing." Phra Ācān Mahā, Khrū Bā Wan, Khrū Bā Thõngkham and Khuṇ Sīhā didn't want any either. Nobody from the Wat Nõng Phue monastic community wanted any either because they were keeping an eye on each other in order to see who had taken Luang Pū [Thet]'s words to heart. (His talks on the subject of "quarrelling over bones" had left a deep impression.)

But I really didn't want any because I thought it was improper to carry the relics of Luang Pū around in my shoulder bag together with all sorts of stuff. I didn't have enough influence to have a *cedī** built for them. Why should I make demerit by taking them with me? There is no record from the time of the Buddha that any monk from any of the four directions took [relics] as their personal possession. What good would it have done me except to go around bragging to people that I had relics of Master Luang Pū? I had already thought this through clearly, so I took nothing. If I had taken any, it would have been a whole handful because my upajjhāya usually treated me favourably. After all, he was the head of that community.

Master Luang Pū's Dhammavinaya is not a secret. Up until the day of his last breath, he had built a bridge for his children and grandchildren. This raises the following objection: And Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha are not a gold and silver bridge that demands

respect and worship from the heart, are they? The answer: The objection is justified. They are and always will be.

Here is the speech given by Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī before the saṅgha: "Dear members of the practice tradition group, this is the last day of funeral duties for Phra Ācān, who has left us. From now on, let's meet here once a year, shall we?" That was all. But in the first two years, the meeting really did take place. There was an attendance limit and many monks went. Over time, it gradually declined. The reason for this was probably events such as "Mahājāti" and "Buddhābhisekha",[211] which stripped the thread of the screw and disregarded Master Luang Pū's traditional way of practice. Those who know everything inside and out were no longer keen on [the meeting]. Those who lived nearby couldn't skip it, but were reluctant to come. Among the old ranks of lay followers who still knew Master Luang Pū's real practice, misgivings arose. And the aforementioned meeting location was no longer as secluded as before. It changed completely into the remoteness of a village, then later into the remoteness of a city. Perhaps that was the reason. I can only guess, assume and speculate.

In any case, the Supreme Court, namely aniccaṁ, sits on the throne and doesn't descend from the pulpit. So with this, all three worlds are crammed full. It is decided according to the code of aniccaṁ, the first code of the three characteristics. But when we have seen the lower robe, we must also see the upper robe and also the saṅghāṭi, so all three [robes] are complete. Likewise, if we have seen aniccaṁ, then in essence all three characteristics are included in it. If we have seen the skin, then we must also see bones and flesh, as another example. If we were to see the face, then we would also have to see the eyes, to see the cheeks. For example.

Who is it that sees this? Who is the owner? The one who sees? Or is it just seeing? Who is it that knows that there is simply seeing? Who is it that knows that there is only knowing? It all goes back and forth, and yet it remains merely a play with one's own shadow, as a particularly subtle formation.

After Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī had instructed the monastic community to meet once a year in Wat Pā Suddhāvās, especially the

thudong monks, the monks and novices who lived far away took their leave one by one and headed back in all directions to their own samnaks. And there were also many who departed and went straight into seclusion as they saw fit. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī, Luang Pū Õn, Luang Pū Fan, Luang Pū Kongmā, Luang Pū Thet and Luang Pū Mahā Bua were the last group to leave Suddhāvās.

During the time we were waiting to complete the funeral duties, Luang Pū Thet had asked me, "And when the funeral ceremony is over, where do you want to go?" I said to Venerable Luang Pū, "Master Luang Pū Mun has instructed me: 'I want Than Mahā Bua to lead the group in this Bān Nõng Phue after I have passed away. Don't let the team spirit fall apart, don't go anywhere else. The people of Nõng Phue will be very sad.' But I have two alternatives in mind: if I don't go with Than Ācān Mahā Bua, then I'll go with Phra Ācān." That was all. The Venerable One is a deep thinker, and he replied, "If you go with Than Mahā Bua, fine. If you go with me, also fine." That was all.

Venerable Phra Ācān Mahā Bua kept to the original instructions that the Great Luang Pū had given him. He said, "And when the ceremony is over, I'll travel to Bān Nõng Bua, which is west of this very Bān Nõng Phue. And then I'll go into the rains retreat at Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue, as instructed by the Great Master Luang Pū."

Luang Pū Thet had opened up a neutral possibility for me. Venerable Phra Ācān Mahā had opened a possibility for me in accordance with the Great Master Luang Pū's original instructions. And then in front of Phra Ācān Mahā, that is, in front of his eyes, my tears flowed. He responded to this in a straightforward manner, "If you go with Phra Ācān Thet, I am fine with that."

Then I bowed in farewell to Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī. The Venerable Cao Khuṇ said, "You know very well in your heart: 'If I stay with Phra Ācān Mahā Bua, he has no objection. If I stay with Than Phra Ācān Thet, he[212] won't mind either.' You know that in your heart of hearts. But you feel quite lost at the moment and don't really know who you should stay with, who you should go with, as there are good reasons on both sides. But your confidence

is not retreating from the Buddha's teaching! If you really want to go to Canthaburī with Than Thet, then first of all go with Phra Ācān Mahā Suphat and get the means to cover the travelling expenses from my fund because it's a long journey. Phra Ācān Mahā Suphat knows how to do this. I'll arrange for him to provide [the funds] for you. That is not a problem."[213]

The die was cast. I went with Venerable Luang Pū Thet. To be honest, I didn't look that great because the Great Master Luang Pū had instructed me to stay in Nõng Phue for at least a year under the guidance of Phra Ācān Mahā. But there was Luang Tā Thõngyū, and he had several more rains than Phra Ācān Mahā. So, it was probably not very practical for Phra Ācān Mahā to live there, and he would only return for a single rains retreat.

If I had returned there that year, I would have been overcome with sadness – in the place where I had seen Master Luang Pū every day and now no longer saw him. I would only have seen his sleeping place, his sitting place, his walking meditation path, his eating place, his place for excreting, for drinking and for expounding the Dhamma. Images from the past, emotions of being moved, sadness, silence, loneliness and a stale feeling would have beset me in his samnak. Then I would have become a master of tears again. Back then, after the Great Luang Pū had taken his last breath, I felt as if I was going mad, losing my mind. I was confused and at a loss. It was a time when I grieved more than was pretty to see. It was a time when I brooded more than was good for me. This "more than good" is a drug. It becomes an addiction that is very difficult to cure. You think you're within the realms of what's appropriate, but an outside observer would say that you've gone too far.

It is not possible to reasonably determine the level of what is good and beautiful in a character and trait of this kind. It is a matter where there is no level that can be measured. But in the realm of the heart, decline or ascent is *paccattaṁ* – something that each heart will know for itself in each case.

Monetary donations for me

The monetary donations I received, which had been gnawed from Master Luang Pū's bones during the paṁsukūla ceremonies, only amounted to 40 baht at that time, and I didn't use a single satāng of it. I donated it towards [the budget for] the Uposatha hall in that Wat Suddhāvās.

At the time of death, when Great Luang Pū had breathed his last, the total funds in the monastery amounted to only 400 baht, and these were the funds from Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue. There were about four rolls of robe-cloth left. There were still 14 canisters of paraffin [in Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue]. There were 300 cans of milk left. The cloth and milk were brought in and used at the funeral ceremony. Only the paraffin wasn't touched. All sorts of things were brought along to be used at the ceremonies, such as scoops, cups and lanterns. For example. When the ceremony was over, Luang Pū Õn arranged for everything to be sent back to Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue in an orderly manner.

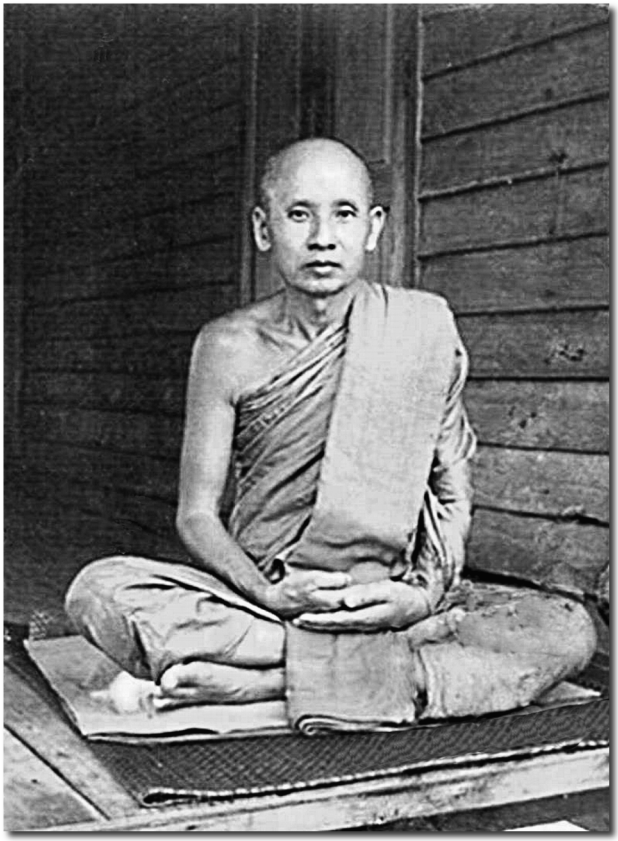
This raises the question: Why were all sorts of things that were to be used at the funeral ceremony brought from Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue? The answer: At that time, materialism was not yet popular because money was still expensive. So the monastic community came to an agreement to take the material on a temporary basis. They sent me and Khrūbā Thõngkham back to get it. The grieving people of Bān Nõng Phue had probably misunderstood this, but Phra Ācān Mahā Bua responded and explained to them, "We are not taking these things as an inheritance for Wat Pā Suddhāvās! And the Venerables Thõngkham and Lā are not taking them to be their private property either. And the initiative to take the things to be used at the ceremony also didn't come from Venerables Lā and Thõngkham. But rather, the initiative came from the monastic community, from the theras and anutheras. If we were to assign another monk to collect the items, that wouldn't be right because it wouldn't be a monk who has spent a long time at Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue. I would ask you lay followers not to get carried away in all sorts of ponderings here." And with that, the problem was resolved.

The home was falling to pieces and the monks felt lost. As did the lay people. Wherever they looked outwardly with the eye of the flesh in any of the four directions, everything seemed stale to them. Wherever they looked inwardly in the realm of mindfulness and wisdom, they saw only the compass directions of old age, illness, death, loss, and disappointed wishes, the compass directions of aniccaṁ, dukkhaṁ, anattā, the compass directions of *nibbida, virāga, vimutti, visuddhi*,[214] and Nibbāna.

This is the compass of the noble, of the special people. It shows how to cut out the centre of the world. It is not a compass that points towards continued circling, as is the case with the compass of the inhabitants of worldly limitations. Worldly limitation is the compass that points towards continued circling. The supramundane is the compass that points in the straight direction to be marched. There is no turning left or right because it is a clear path with no stumbling blocks to trip over.

On a Mission to the South (1950-52)

To be able to die properly means to die in meditation. When dying, one must meditate on the three characteristics and then make a turn within: "There is no one who dies. Rather, there are only formations that change and cease. The Dhamma of not being born and not dying is there and remains."



Phra Ācān Thet Desaraṁsī, Phūket in the 1950s

On a mission to the south

Into solitude with Luang Pū Thet

A further report concerning Luang Pū Thet. When the cremation was over, the Venerable Luang Pū took me with him into solitude in Wat Pā Bān Cõm Śī in the area of the district of the very same provincial capital Sakon Nakhõn. [The forest monastery] had been built near a crossroads. One of the roads led to Wat Pā Phūthõnphithak, also known as Wat Pā Dhātu Nā Weng. One led to Nakhõn Phanom province, one to Udõn and one to the city of Sakon. Five monks were there, including Luang Pū. I devoted myself entirely to the practice, regardless of the time of day or night because I saw that it was a period in which I did not have any further duties. If something significant arose during meditation, I would let Master Luang Pū Thet know. Luang Pū Thet was someone who possessed great wisdom. If someone got stuck in the practice of samādhi, he would insist on them applying only samādhi. If someone got stuck in upacārasamādhi in connection with various nimittas, he would urge them in the same way. If someone got stuck in insight wisdom, he would insist on applying only insight wisdom to it. Even if it all became too much, the Venerable One had many skilful means of correction on hand that helped us to remain calm and reasonable. He would say, "We do this as a means of achieving fluency, and also as a means of liberation, of escape. Not like an arahant. Such an arahant does it as a means of temporarily maintaining the kammic fruit of the khandhas, but with absolutely no grasping or attachment; their realisation is in fact all-encompassing and swift, going far beyond this [our practice] here."

So, this applies to the kammic fruit of the khandhas and the bases of behaviour, which continue a great tradition through the absence of the defilements; that means the deluded one, always up to mischief, was thinned out. To put it crudely: one lives off the

interest of one's assets by day and by night, not burdened by the idea that the source of one's income could disappear somewhere, and not fearing that thieves could steal it away somewhere. One stands above it.[215]

After we had stayed at Wat Pā Bān Cŏm Śī for about a month, Luang Pū Thet prepared to take us to Wat Pā Khao Nŏi Thā Chalaeb on the coast in Canthaburī province. This was the place where he had spent the last rains retreat in the previous year. To do this, it was necessary to change to a train in Udŏn and travel first to Bangkok. So, the lay followers Bua Thaeo and Mr. Khian arranged a car to transport us from Sakon Nakhŏn to Udŏn. When we arrived in Udŏn, we went to Wat Thiphayarat for the night. This monastery had been built by lay follower Thiphayarat during the reign of Rāma VI, a short distance behind Wat Bodhisomphŏn.

In fact, Luang Pū Thet was to pay the rail travel expenses for all the monks who accompanied him. The lay followers from Sakon Nakhŏn knew that many monks wanted to travel with Luang Pū to Canthaburī, and so they provided sufficient funds accordingly.

I thought about it several times and came to the following conclusion: we should support Luang Pū a little with the travel expenses because the possibility to do so was there. At that time, during the reign of Field Marshal P. Phibūnsongkhrām, all trains, no matter which line and which type, had to have a special second-class compartment in which monks could travel in both directions free of charge. But the monks who wanted to take advantage of this had to first have a stamped letter of confirmation from the Cao Gaṇa, the head of the monastic order in the province in which the journey began. So I hurriedly requested the monks' identity documents from Luang Pū Thet and the five other monks. Then I went to Wat Bodhisomphŏn and had Mahā Suphat issue a travel letter for each of us, with Bangkok as our destination. Mahā Suphat, as mentioned before, was my nephew. He was Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī's secretary. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī was still in Sakon Nakhŏn and had not yet returned.

When I had received the travel letters, I quickly returned to Wat Thiphayarat. I travelled there and back on a tricycle motor rick-

shaw. At that time, these tricycles were called taxi or taksī. At this time, they are only called tricycles.[216] For "at this or that time" always refers to a temporary section of the respective time. And at the time of that same day at 6 pm, we boarded the express train from Udõn to Bangkok.

Luang Pū Thet accepts an invitation to the south

When we arrived in Bangkok, we went to stay at Wat Bõromnivās. The monks there were all scholar monks from Īsān. We stayed in the kuṭi at the turtle pond with Khuṇ Bunluea, whom we knew well because he had been to practice with Luang Pū Thet as a novice. He took us around on a sightseeing tour all day long. For two days we travelled by tram[217] and had to willingly trot along behind him. If he wanted us to get on, we just got on. If he wanted us to get off, we just got off because we had no idea where we should get on or off. It was only the zoological garden that he did not take us to because he was of the opinion that it was not appropriate for our status.

But I didn't lose my self-control, and in my heart I thought: "Oh yes, when the people who are on a round trip in this saṁsāra crowd together, they do so in the capital of the country concerned. In the realm of ageing, illness, death, separation and loss, they are brought together on the same level. In terms of good and bad deeds, there are different levels, distinguished by kamma and its consequences. But as a goal where suffering ends completely, for all, there is only Nibbāna. The only point of divergence being the question as to who has already arrived there and who will arrive later." All the time I was dealing with Dhamma in this way.

When we had been in that Wat Bõromnivās for about six or seven days, a certain Phra Ācān Mahā Pin Jalito met with Luang Pū Thet and invited him emphatically to try a trip to the southern part of the country, together with his disciples. Luang Pū replied, "We cannot all go. We have to try it out in shifts, one after the other. And if it proves to be useful for the practice, then it can be arranged so that a [Dhamma] ambassador follows, and takes charge of this

later group. But I want this group to go to the forest monastery at Thā Chalaeb [for the time being], in Canthaburī province, where I have already spent the rains retreat for two consecutive years, and wait there. I want Khuṇ Can Sohm[218] to take these monks there because he has been there with me before. At the moment there are no monks there. If we can agree on that, then we will split into two groups. The group going to Canthaburī must get ready today. At 4 pm, you will board a ship with steerage cabins at Sawatdī Pier. I will board the train at Bangkok Nõi station with Than Mahā Pin and Khuṇ Kaṣem."

When the time came, we said goodbye. My heart was sad, uninspired, not enjoying it at all because Luang Pū Thet wanted to take a different path and I would then lack warmth. Besides, I longed for Phra Ācān Mahā Bua in Sakon Nakhõn. Another part of my heart thought of the Great Luang Pū, whose last breath[219] had been not so many days ago. Ah well, three points, three aspects, met and beset me.

From the monastery, they sent us by car to the Sawatdī Pier. The ship with the steerage cabins was anchored in the middle of the Cao Phrayā River. The fare was 25 baht per monk. There were five of us. We crossed over in a small boat, docked at the big ship and boarded. There were about a hundred people on the ship. It was a cargo ship for transporting rice. At 6 pm, a horn signal sounded and the ship headed straight out to sea across the river estuary.

I had not had much confidence in ships my whole life because I was afraid that it might be dangerous [to travel by them]. I asked myself: "If the ship sinks I will meet death. So where will I be reborn?" I answered myself: "Whether I am reborn somewhere or not reborn anywhere, I want the process of dying and of meditation to remain connected. Then it doesn't matter." To die without meditation means not to be able to die properly. To be able to die properly means to die in meditation. When dying, one must meditate on the three characteristics and then make a turn within: "There is no one who dies. Rather, there are only formations that change and cease. The Dhamma of not being born and not dying is there and remains."

Thā Chalaeb in Canthaburī

The next day, at around 4 pm, the ship did arrive in Thā Chalaeb in Canthaburī province. And so we went ashore, went to Wat Pā Thā Chalaeb and stayed there. It was April 1950. The air on the coast was quite fresh, but there were also many mosquitoes. We practised with full commitment, regardless of the time of day or night. One day I decided to practice walking meditation from 5 pm until dawn. When it was time for the alms round, I stopped. During the alms round, I anchored my mindfulness firmly in the legs as they went back and forth. At the same time, I contemplated Dhamma. I was aware of both simultaneously; there was nothing that came before or after – when the body was moving in short steps, long steps or left, right; in the right or left leg that stepped on the ground or moved forward. I was aware of all this in its own time, and it did not seem difficult to me.

And I also went into seclusion in the Pig Bay, the Rubber Bay – that was in Laem Singh district – partly on foot, partly by rowing boat. If there were three of us, we went on foot. I went into seclusion in Khlung district together with Than Phūn,[220] and we stayed in Wat Khlung, which had been built by Than Ācān Viriyang.[221] He was there too. We also went to Wat Kong Sī Rai, but didn't stay overnight because we saw that [the forest] there was very dense and dark. Then we turned around and walked to Wat Pā Sāi Ngām in the district of the provincial capital, Canthaburī. We stayed with Than Ācān Baen[222] and Ācān San. Both Than Ācān Baen and Than Ācān San were very helpful and generous monks. At that time all of these monasteries were secluded and remote. Than Thavin[223] took us on a tour to Bān Pohng Raet, Bān Khom Bāng, Wat Khlõng Kung and Wat Pā Noehn Khao Kaeo. And so we circled around in that zone and finally came to rest at our starting point, in Wat Pā Thā Chalaeb.

I stayed in Canthaburī for about three months. Time passed and June arrived. One day at five o'clock, while I was doing walking meditation, Thit Aṇothay, the owner of the Canthaburī Phāṇit transport company, Bangkok Line, handed me an express letter. I

tore it open on the spot and read it. The letter contained the following message:

"My dear Khuṇ Can Sohm, Khuṇ Lā, Khuṇ Aruṇ und Khuṇ Phūn!

At the moment, I am staying in a forest monastery in the district of Rõn Phibūn, Nakhõn Śī Thammarāt. I want you to travel to Bangkok as quickly as possible and stay in Wat Bõromnivās. Please join a group travelling with Thit Aṇothay from the Canthaburī Phāṇit transport company. The owner of the vehicle has already been informed. And if you wait in Wat Bõromnivās, Than Mahā Pin will pick you up there.

Thinking of you with good wishes, Thet Desaraṁsī, Pin Jalito P."

So we got our things quickly in order and went to Wat Pā Khlõng Kung, which was close to the city, to spend the night. We quickly notified the lay followers Klui and Õ from Thā Chalaeb. Both were closely connected to the monastery and provided a car to take us to Wat Pā Khlõng Kung. Thit Aṇothay also travelled back with us. He arranged the following with us, "Tonight at four o'clock in the morning, please have the Khrū Bā Ācāns wait in front of the monastery for the vehicle." Then he went home to the city.

And we went to Phra Khrū Mongkhon, the abbot, and bowed in advance for our departure at four o'clock in the morning. He arranged it so that we could sleep together in one kuti. Dear impermanence! That night I couldn't sleep at all. That's a character trait of mine which is hard to remedy. When I have to go somewhere in a hurry, I just can't sleep.

When it was four o'clock, we set off punctually to get into the vehicle in front of the monastery. But the vehicle didn't leave until about 30 minutes after four. When we reached Rayõng, the vehicle stopped for our morning meal, but it was almost noon. We ate hastily from bowls and plates, only about ten bites each. There were about 60 passengers crammed into the vehicle. When we were near the district capital of Sat Hīb, the radiator started to leak. For the rest of the journey the water had to be topped up at short intervals. The owner of the vehicle grumbled, "Well, he praised this vehicle,

saying: 'It goes so fast that you will gain prestige because of me.' But now I have lost face because of him." When we arrived in Bangkok, it was already dark. We entered via Sālā Daeng. From Sālā Daeng onwards, we had to push the vehicle. A lot of time had been lost by the time we arrived at the Canthaburī Phāṇit company branch. While pushing, he even joked, "Canthaburī transpush company, not transport company"[224]. When we arrived, the police accompanied us because they were concerned for our safety. They had a closed car which they used to take us to Wat Bõromnivās. We arrived there at around 8 pm and stayed overnight in the kuṭi by the turtle pond as before.

Oh, dear impermanence! Writing down the story of one's own suffering really does drag on quite a bit. I can't find an end to it. Even in this one life, well, there are all sorts of aspects. I want disenchantment with regard to birth and being – just that! From now on let there be no more being and no more birth for me!

> If practicing little, well that should be changed.
> I practice then much, liberation to touch
> I no longer want to go round in saṁsāra.
> However much weeds of defilements abound,
> the true holy wisdom shall burn them all down.

May knowledge and vision of liberation manifest in every moment of life force and in every moment of the heart. I gratefully surrender my life to Nibbāna, in every moment of the heart. I have absolutely no other intention – such as the intention to be the owner of the heart. I banish any such intention completely and immediately. For intention is such an important medicine.

Reunion with Luang Pū Thet

After spending the first night at Wat Bõromnivās, we got up early for recitation and meditation, and then it was time for the alms round. After we had finished eating, Phra Ācān Mahā Pin came to meet us there at around eleven o'clock. And so we prepared for the journey to the forest monastery in the district of Rõn Phibūn in the province of Nakhõn Śī Thammarāt. But this time we borrowed the

funds for it, 900 baht, from Wat Bŏromnivās because free rail travel had now been abolished throughout the country.

The next day, we went to Bangkok Nõi station to board the express train. It left Bangkok Nõi station at 11 am and arrived in Surāt at six in the morning. So we got off the train to collect alms for our meal. The train also stopped there because it couldn't cross the Tāpī River. The bridge had been destroyed during the war between the Japanese and the British. After having our meal in the morning, we took a boat to the other side of the river, caught a train from there, and arrived at Wat Pā Rõn Phibūn later than after 2 pm. We then stayed at that Wat Pā Rõn Phibūn for several nights.

I saw an inscription in front of my kuṭi: "Her Majesty Queen Sawāng Vaḍḍhanā, era of Rāma V." There were several kuṭis, quite sufficient. There was only one monk living there. The air was cool. A waterfall came down from the mountain on the side of the railway line in an easterly direction, not far away, only three rope lengths. There was a Buddha footprint built during the reign of Rāma V, at the same time as the monastery. When I saw it, I felt moved, and love and respect welled up in my heart at the thought that: "No matter what the era, the members of the line and family of this king and his queen respect and love the Buddha's teaching as something great and blessed for all Buddhists. Yes, since time immemorial, starting in the time of the Buddha, they have been the right hand of the Buddha's teaching in a truly special way."

Now I want to say something about Luang Pū Thet. When we arrived in Rõn Phibūn, Luang Pū Thet was not there. He had moved to Wat Phiśān, about a kilometre south of Rõn Phibūn, according to my estimate. After getting up, going for alms and having our meal, we packed our requisites and went to the monastery where the Venerable One was staying. And there we met Phra Ācān Khamphāy and Phra Ācān Brohmā, who were offering him a massage. These Phra Ācāns Khamphāy and Brohmā had moved down to the south many years ago. Both of them came from Īsān. After I had finished the first bow to Luang Pū Thet, I felt very moved in my heart: "I had been separated from the most important theras from Īsān and I had been on the move again. And then I was separated

again for almost three months. Well, but just now I have met one of them." I was filled up with it completely, and then the tears flowed and bathed my cheeks. Luang Pū Thet laughed and tried to guess what was in my heart, "If someone who has been with important monks of the practice tradition is separated from them and does not see them for a long time, then he will be moved as soon as he sees one again." He had guessed rightly, he was not wrong at all, not even a little.

Then we stayed there for one night. After getting up, going on alms round and finishing the meal, the Venerable Thet led the group back to Wat Pā Rõn Phibūn for the continuation of their stay. When we had been there for two or three days, the Venerable Thet, together with Than Ācān Mahā Pin and Khuṇ Kaṣem, crossed the sea to Phūket to continue in the search for a place for the rains retreat because it was already June. And then he left us five monks alone in Rõn Phibūn and told us to wait here for the time being under the guidance of Than Ācān Can Sohm. Aniccā, Saṅkhārā, Dukkhā! After four or five days, we received a telegram: "Travel by train to Kan Tang district, p. Trang. Stay overnight at the Good Deeds Station. Wait for the ship at the pier."

The day after, around 2 pm, a lay follower from Rõn Phibūn district put us on a train that went back to Thung Song and from Thung Song straight south-west. This train came up from Songkhlā, went as far as Thung Song and then turned sharply left in the opposite south-westerly direction. Then it stopped at the end of the line at the Kan Tang Pier on the shore of the Indian Ocean. After arriving, we went to the forest adjacent to the Good Deeds Station to stay overnight. After getting up, going on alms round and taking the meal, I received two letters in an open envelope. One of them containing the following message:

"I want Khuṇ Lā to deliver this letter in person to the Kan Tang District Administration. Be ready to board the ship to Phūket in the evening. Then rest in the Chinese temple and wait there. In the afternoon, a vehicle will pick you up and take you to Khohk Klõy, p. Phang Ngā. (As for food, someone in the Chinese temple will come and invite you.)"

Then I hurried to deliver the [other] letter to the district administration office. It was not far from where we were staying. I went alone. When I arrived at the place they called "district business", the boss of this district administration was extremely surprised. Everyone there jumped up from their seats simultaneously and raised their hands in añjali. So I said, "all the best, all the best", and handed him the letter. He quickly read it to the assembled team:

"Place of accommodation Khohk Klõy, Prov. Phang Ngā, day…, month…, year…

Blessings be with you![225] To all of you in the administrative staff of this district office who have long held respect for the Buddha's teaching, I would like to ask you to kindly convey my urgent request to Mr. Pho Dechaphon of the customs authority to have the thudong monks, who are waiting at the Good Deeds Station, brought to Phuket as quickly as possible by ship. I hope that this is not a problem for you, and it is also a meritorious deed, and not just a small one.

With respectful greetings, Phra Mahā Pin Jalito"

Then I said goodbye and returned to the place where I was staying. At 4 pm someone came and said, "Please get ready to go to the pier to board the ship. The ship doesn't leave until 6 pm, but remember to be there before then and wait. It's more convenient because of the seats."

Phūket and Phang Ngā

The ship indeed departed at 6 pm. There were about 200 people on the ship. The ship headed directly south-west. It was the season when the seas were at their most extreme, the waning moon in June. I decided to meditate without interruption and without letting up because I was risking my life more than usual. When staying in a samnak, it was quite normal for me to risk my life with every breath, so why should I rely on life? The waves came rolling in, each one almost as high as a mountain! The ship jumped over the waves, one after the other, with the bow facing the waves. The wind

was blowing from the south-west, and waves have to go the way the wind is blowing. If the ship had turned its flank to the waves, it would inevitably have sunk.

When I humbly contemplate the Dhamma in this, then it is simply a matter of external waves. The internal waves of greed, hatred and delusion are waves that rage in the nature of the khandhas, to which we have even become accustomed. For those with many defilements, the waves are high. For those with few defilements, the waves are gentle. For one with no defilements, there are no waves at all. The ship, that is, the heart, no longer drifts anywhere. But that is easier said than done, because a master of the firm grip can achieve difficult things. A master of the clever tongue can only accomplish things that come easily to him. Difficult and easy naturally depend on what one likes or dislikes.

When the ship had docked in Phūket, we went to the Chinese temple, which was about 15 rope lengths from the pier. There, the lay followers put something into our bowls at around eleven o'clock. There was only one Chinese monk with five rains there. He wore trousers with wide, long legs. He greeted us with a friendly word. He ate vegetarian food. After the meal, the Chinese monk showed us around the place. In the kutis and viharas, there were statues of the Venerable Kaccāyana everywhere. He asked, "You speaka Chanis?" Answer: "No speaka Chanis."[226]

The vehicle to Phang Ngā picked us up later than after 2 pm. For about 40 kilometres, the vehicle sped along the road. Then we went over the water again. By ship. They called the place Chatrachay-Pier. We reached the other shore. They called the place Nun-Pier. That belonged to the province of Phang Ngā, district Takua Thung. We got into a car and travelled another 30 kilometres. Eventually we arrived at the Khohk Klõy crossroads. One fork led to Phūket, one to Takua Pā, one to the provincial capital Phang Ngā, and a small road branched off to the sea. And there they built a forest monastery near Nā Klāng, not far from Khohk Klõy. The terrain was flat. There were two routes for the alms round. One led to Khohk Klõy, one to Nā Klāng.

Sixth rains retreat in Khohk Klõy

In that year, lay people from Phang Ngā province built monasteries at a rapid pace and created four samnaks, as it was almost time to enter the rains retreat. In Krasohm samnak, Than Ācān Mahā Pin was made head. In the samnak in Thāy Mueang district, Phra Ācān Can Sohm was made head. In the Kā Lai samnak, Ācān Sām[227] was made head. Luang Pū Thet was the head at the Khohk Klõy Nā Klang samnak. Phra Ācān Mahā Pin came and requested me as fellow resident, but Luang Pū Thet did not want to give me away for the following reasons: "Khuṇ Lā has spent many years with important monks. He is feeling quite lost at the moment, so I want to keep him with me for the time being. The same goes for Khuṇ Arun." There was also Khuṇ Phet, a monk from Chumphon province, Lang Suan district, who went along as an extra monk. Khuṇ Kasem stayed with us. The others were dealt with as seemed appropriate, that being Ācān Brohmā, Ācān Khamphāy, and there was also Luang Pū Khamphan. And they had five disciples with them. They travelled around the area, met up and then parted again.

There was a commotion between [our] lay followers and the Mahānikāya side. It was normal for them to verbally attack each other because there had never been Dhammayut monks in Phūket and Phang Ngā. But in the end, things did calm down.[228]

It always depends on kamma and the fruit of kamma of the parties involved, in accordance with the nature of things. There is no court that decides on victory or defeat in the world, no matter what the era. Those who do not believe in kamma and its consequences always like to cling to external victories or defeats. In the realm of the heart and mind, they will not be able to approach the Buddha's teaching and arrive at the truth. They like their food well done on both sides and are not afraid of swallowing a fishbone. And they like to do bad things, both in secret and in public. Those who believe in kamma and its consequences and trust in them will not do anything bad, either in secret or in public. They do not even do good deeds to show off or in front of witnesses. All this, the disposition to do good with all one's heart, both in secret and in public, is called *supaṭipanno*, that is, to practice well and straight. Once one

has gone beyond the realm of the puthujjana, the ordinary person, through wisdom that knows the right path, one no longer deviates to the left or right and no longer has to guess.

During the rains retreat in Khohk Klõy, we showed respect and love for the practice form that Luang Pū Mun had taught us, for example in the dhutaṅga practices. In the middle of that rains retreat there were problems with some who wanted to have a relaxation and a loosening. But Luang Pū Thet often preached:[229] "Focus on the practice and don't let yourself go! Dhammavinaya is an old tradition, by no means a new invention."

I agreed with him completely. If we wanted to adapt everything to the epochs, phases and current circumstances, there would be no limit, and then there would be no khõ wat left, no practice at all. The partisans of the defilements are a well-known group. They make the heart and mind quickly become bored and slack. We stretch a clothesline to hang laundry and we think we've stretched it as taut as we can. But when it's exposed to the sun and laundry is hung on it to dry, it becomes slack until the laundry scrapes on the ground. When the four requisites come in abundance, khõ wat and practice gradually become slacker and slacker. When the four requisites don't come in abundance, one just has to wait, but that bores them again. If someone becomes ordained in the Buddha's teaching but no longer has the liberation from suffering in saṁsāra in mind, then every plan that can be imagined will, in one way or another, strip the thread of the screw, and one becomes the master of tricks and deception.

A vision of Luang Pū Mun

One day, around midnight, my interest was focused on Luang Pū Mun's khõ wat, and I wanted to make sure that not a single point escaped me. Then I contemplated the formations, which are empty of a being, empty of a person in two respects, while at the same time breathing in and out: "Not me, not mine." This continued without pause, without interruption. It became quieter and quieter. Then the vision of Master Luang Pū Mun manifested, he came and

stood there in a delicate way. He was wearing the robe diagonally, with one shoulder uncovered. His left hand was hanging loosely and was placed on his body below his stomach, while his right hand was hanging loosely and covered his left hand. He had half-lowered his gaze. He had a shoulder bag hanging on his right. It was a new shoulder bag. There were objects in the bag, as it was bulgingly full. He assumed the standing meditation posture, an inspiring, touching posture, facing towards the south. He stood on the flat ground, south of my kuti, about five arm spans away, and north of Luang Pū Thet's kuti, about twelve arm spans away. He was facing Luang Pū Thet's kuṭi. At that time, I was in Luang Pū Thet's kuṭi to perform some task, and Luang Pū Thet was in his kuṭi too. The kuṭi, however, did not obscure the view outside.

When I saw Master Luang Pū Mun standing there so gracefully, in such an inspiring and touching way, my mind was filled with pīti and joy: "Ah, Master Luang Pū is standing there, facing me, so exemplary, so incredibly beautiful." In my heart the thought appeared in a flash: "I must hover over there in a kneeling position with the hands in añjali. It must not be too high, about waist height. And then I will slowly land in front of Master Luang Pū at his feet, keeping my hands in añjali unchanged." The instant I had thought this I floated off, keeping my kneeling position and hands in añjali. But when I had come close to Master Luang Pū, at about arm's length, I landed on my knees, came into contact with the ground, and simultaneously laid my head back and looked up at Master Luang Pū. And even the tears kept flowing.

Master Luang Pū asked, "Do you want to replace your shoulder bag?" I indicated to him, "But no, with respect! Because the bag that I am currently using was given to me by Father-and-Mother Khrū Bā Ācān." And Master Luang Pū said a second time, "Take the bag!" And he stretched out his hand. I signalled, "But I'm not taking it. The old bag I use is still good. It's not the time yet, it's not yet worn out. Besides, it's the bag that my Father-and-Mother Khrū Bā Ācān gave me." And at that moment, Luang Pū disappeared. I knelt there with my hands in añjali. The heart was still occupied in the previous place and had not yet moved anywhere. For another moment he came back and stood in the same place as before, "Go on, take

the bag!" I said, "With all due respect, I really don't want it." In this way I persisted as before. He said, "In a moment many lay people will come to see me. So I will go." After these words, he disappeared completely.

When the mind had drawn back, it saw the breathing in and out again, together with the contemplation: "Not me, not mine." But tears appeared and wet the cheeks. My gaze was clear and alert; I had not slept. I can remember that taste clearly. No deva, māra, brahma can make me forget it ever again, until the day of my last breath.

When a suitable opportunity arose the next day, I went to Master Luang Pū Thet, bowed at his feet and related it all to him in detail. He replied, "It is the same for me. If we revere any Khrū Bā Ācān deeply, he will manifest himself and let himself be seen. At a time of day when our interest is in the Dhamma, in the various points of the khõ wat, and we have no doubts about the practice, the khõ wat will come to our aid with various upāyas to help our good intentions. It is about examining ourselves to see how firmly we are established in the Dhamma. Our inner being can examine itself from within. We can weigh our inner weight, there is absolutely no doubt about that." Then Luang Pū Thet asked, "When you contemplate it all, what meaning do you take from this story?"

I responded, "I have already found some meaning in it, but I don't know whether it is right or wrong. If it is not right, I ask for a correction. I have gained the following meaning from it: 'My dear Lā, the practice of khõ wat that I taught in that Nõng Phue period, which refers to living together in a community, may well change in accordance with the current circumstances, depending on the community of friends. As for the heart, the mind, the inner being, that is up to each individual.' That is why he insisted so persistently that I should replace my shoulder bag, but because of the strength of my utterance of truth that I was not willing to do so, Master Luang Pū Mun did not exert any pressure on me. That is why he disappeared out of decency. That is how I contemplated it. Please, what is right and what is wrong?" Luang Pū Thet replied, "Yes, you have solved your problem with enough sense and reason yourself. If I had had

to solve it, I would have done it the same way." That was the end of the matter.

In the second rains retreat of the Phūket and Phang Ngā period, the number of samnaks in Phūket rose by two: at Khao To' Sae' behind the district court in the Bāng Ngua municipality in the district of the provincial capital Phūket, and at Phūket airport. This was because Khrū Bā Ācāns and monks from their circle of friends came down one after the other without interruption [from the north-east to the south].[230] Luang Pū Thet spent the rains retreat in Phūket. Phra Ācān Rian, Wat Pā Tanohd Suan Phrik, district Takua Thung; Phra Ācān Mahā Pin, Wat Pā Kālai, d. Takua Thung; Ācān Can Sohm, d. Thāy Mueang. For the most part, they met where Luang Pū Thet was staying because coming and going by car was not a problem. In the second and third year, I spent the rains retreat with Phra Ācān Rian,[231] in each case in a community of five or six monks. All kuṭis had a floor made of split bamboo, a roof and walls made of woven bamboo strips.

In the dry season, I liked to go alone into seclusion, partly over earthy mountains, partly over rocky mountains, because in Phūket and Phang Ngā there was nothing but rows of mountains. But there were also rows of mineral ore mines, tin mines and rubber tree plantations. There were also rows of forest animals because they did not hunt them here as they did in Īsān. But they did hunt the sea fish and the shrimps and mussels in the sea. There really were extremely few thieves and other criminals.

Internal regulations for the saṅgha

Master Luang Pū Thet had a great deal of great wisdom and many, many methods that he drew upon and employed with his disciples. In the year when he was staying in Khohk Klõy, he said to those disciples who were spending the rains retreat with him, "I want all of us who have come to this part of the country to openly express our views on whether things are going well or badly. There is no need for you to feel embarrassed." Each of them spoke from a different perspective, but they all followed in the same footsteps. They

only differed as to whether they spoke in a direct or a roundabout way.

When it was my turn, I spoke directly, like a thera, "As for the Father-and-Mother Khrū Bā Ācāns, I would like to place them above myself because they know things right, at the right time, and they know themselves and others from within. As for the younger ones, who don't yet have a clue, it likely won't go so well for them, with all due respect." He asked, "For what reason?" Answer: "Because the area here is not conducive. There is just a lot of water here and mostly only high, steep mountains. Wherever you can climb and clamber, there is always already one of their rubber tree plantations, a mineral ore mine or a tin mine, a rice field or an orchard. As for supporters, robes, alms food, medicine, that is all fine, with respect." Luang Pū thought about it quietly without making any judgement. Then he moved on to other topics.

Phra Ācān Mahā Pin then said, "It would be good to stop accepting invitations to people's homes, because there is a lot of activity associated with it." Khuṇ Aruṇ said, "If we are not to accept invitations to people's homes, then we should not accept them from either the rich or the poor, treating them equally. But if the rich pick us up by car, we are mobile, but then we are again exposed to attacks from the poor. Or how does that work?" Then we all laughed heartily, but did not come to a decision on the matter.

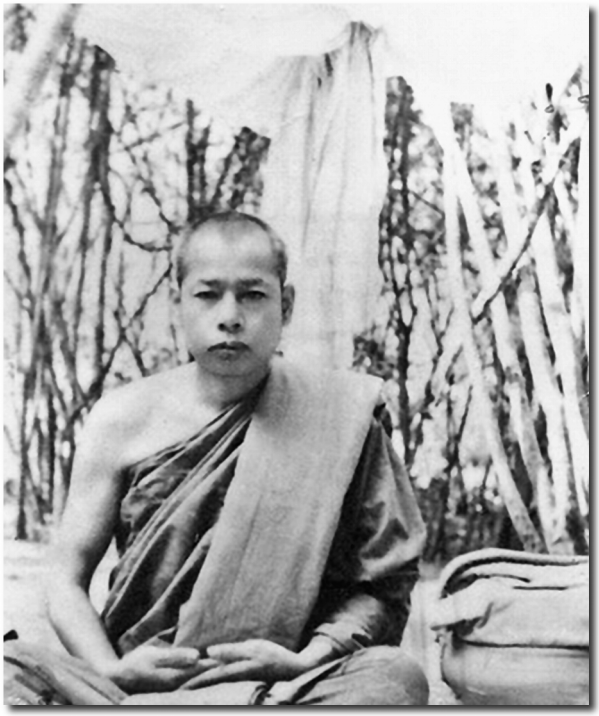
The [making of] holy water and [the use of] water for blessing was stopped. This matter we were able to settle. Welcoming the [providing of] paṁsukūla cloth, this we were able to settle. Not to have personal funds, we were able to settle that as well. We left the use of saṅgha funds, travel expenses, and the like to the lay followers to take care of. The monks should not know the amounts either. If we wanted anything from the lay people, we should first let the monastic community and the theras know. Otherwise, everyone would muddle along as they pleased, getting in each other's way. This point was properly addressed, as it should be.

For build-, build-, building projects whose budget would exceed 1000 baht, the monks should not take the initiative to actively reach into the pockets of others. This point was only fixed for some

samnaks and for some people, but in the first three years everything went flawlessly. In the period that followed it probably got a bit out of hand, but after three years I had already returned, ahead of everyone else in the group.

Thudong in the south (1953)

Ācān birth, Ācān old age, Ācān disease, Ācān death, Ācān of separation from what is desired and of disappointed hope, Ācān aniccaṁ, Ācān dukkhaṁ, Ācān anattā – these are the teachers who teach us disenchantment with regard to the round of existence, regardless of time and circumstance, but we must not be deaf and blind to it. We must always be ready to listen and contemplate, so that we can cover the costs of delusion and also the costs of non-delusion. Otherwise, we will not escape being deluded, dull, and dumb.



Phra Ācān Mahā Pin Jalito, Phang Ngā in the 1950s

Thudong in the south

Means of returning to Īsān

During my travels to other provinces, dating back to times gone by, I always had a particular thought in my heart: "If my life force is durable enough to reach the age of 70 or 80, then where will I retire to die in my old age, in terms of my external residence?" I always imprinted the places well in my mind. I didn't go travelling just to see the villages, towns and countryside, but to escape the suffering of saṁsāra – that was definite. There was no resistance to this at all, and I didn't have to force myself to keep to it, because I had had this intention right from the start, even before I set out for ordination. Having an intention such as this didn't weigh me down.

And when I was in the south, I came to the conclusion: "If I stay here any longer, for a fourth year, I don't think I will be able to stand it. The area, as already mentioned, is not conducive. But if I leave here in front of everyone, it will cause a stir among both the monks and the lay people. It will prompt at least one other monk to leave with me. I'm afraid Khuṇ Aruṇ will want to come back too. If I pretend that I just want to pay a visit to my home, then the lay people will willingly pay for the round trip. But if [some] lay people are already mistrustful and jealous of the monks, well that's reason enough for me to think twice."

When, in the third year, it was time to leave the rains retreat and the month of January had come, I said goodbye and went off alone into seclusion. I was resolved to return to Īsān but said nothing to anyone about it. First, I wanted to go into seclusion for a while and was in no hurry.

The lay people and the monastic community were quite concerned when they saw that I was packing very few requisites. I didn't take any shoes with me. I had sewn and dyed a new upper robe and a saṅghāṭi, but I didn't take them with me because I

thought that if I had to rely on washing with ordinary water[232] for a while, the white cloth would come through again in the new robes. I took two bathing cloths, one of which was old; only one shoulder cloth, only one lower robe. The pillowcase was cancelled. I had a bed sheet – that is, the bathing cloth – which also served as a pillowcase. The shoulder bag was cancelled. The only books I had with me were the Pāṭimokkha and my monk's identity document, wrapped in a small towel. I had a tin of "Monk" brand medicine to treat the venom of animals that bite and sting. I also had a gas lighter, a torch, a thin mosquito net and a not-particularly-large klod. Carrying only on one shoulder and shouldering the klod, I got into a car and got out again in the heart of Phang Ngā province, one district away from where I had spent the rains retreat.

I went to stay in Kan Cave, which was a kilometre east of the town. I crossed a stream about two rope lengths wide but only knee-deep. It flowed continuously down to the inland sea. To clarify, they call the sea north of Phūket the inland sea. But to the south, east, and west of Phuket, it is the good old Indian Ocean, and it is the same to the north of Phuket. This means that the province of Phang Nga is a headland of the province of Surat. It juts out and pierces the Indian Ocean. Phuket is located on an island.

The Indian Ocean and this province of Phang Ngā lie in a deep valley. On the mountain ridges and at the foot of the mountains all manner of forest animals can be found, including tigers, snakes, monkeys, langurs, flying squirrels, gibbons, bears, deer, mountain goats and so on. If I list any more, it will turn into the animal talk of the Brahmajāla Sutta, Sīlakkhandhavagga.[233] A wise man who comes across this while reading, will laugh and say: "He only talks about topics from the village, from the city. A thudong monk of this kind is very strange. This will become thudong on the outer map."

No matter which cave you may be in, you cannot escape from the cave of the body and mind, and this is what we should contemplate. The forest animals that have been living in this cave for an eternity, so that they could establish their homes, their cities, are given free rein – the animals of the kilesas. The first, second and third King of the Lions are greed, hatred and delusion. You could

also call it fire. You could also name it ignorance. They have achieved fame and prestige under many names because they are the regular overlord, the supreme boss of body and mind. They have been the lords of the world, the lords of formations, for an eternity. They fear only the army of Dhamma, only the Noble Path, the Noble Fruit. Below that, there is absolutely nothing they fear. It's as if stable flies and mosquitoes wanted to sting an elephant. Or as if one were to try to pry open a mountain with a toothpick. The defilements of the heart cannot be shaken so easily.

Seclusion in Kan Cave

When I had gone into seclusion, I stayed in Kan Cave. It was a cave with a flat earthen floor, an arched cave. There was a plank bed there, about 40 centimetres high. The lying surface was made of fāk, without a privacy screen, and long enough to lie stretched out on. It was about 90 centimetres wide. I had to place the bowl under the bed at the head end. A stream flowed past the cave. And the cave had a rock ceiling that was three metres high in some places, two metres in others, and four, five metres in others. There was also a path for walking meditation, about seven arm spans long. Running water was available from a knee-deep channel in front of the cave. They had built a shack there for washing bowls. You could also bathe there while sitting. The water was good, clear, clean fresh water. People had no houses upstream. The foothills of the mountain were about a rope length below and were used for one of their rubber tree plantations.

In meditation, I placed a great deal of emphasis on the practice of mettā. I contemplated right down to anattā-dhamma, where there is no hostility, no danger and no enemies, and this coupled with the in and out breath, regardless of the time of day or night. I was of the opinion that I had to rely more and more on my own resources, right up to the walk to and from the alms round. I ate everything together out of the bowl as always, sweet and savoury because I was afraid that otherwise things would get out of hand.

The alms round into the town was not particularly long. Every day the bowl was full. In addition, every day without exception, there was a lay person from the town who followed me and made himself available for the morning meal time. They were of good character. Whatever I asked them to do, there was no talking back. They were honest and well-behaved. One of them said he had never seen a monk come and stay here all alone like this. Usually they would come in groups of three, four or five. They would be gone after five or seven days. And you would be more likely to see them in the town square and at the side of a road where many people pass by, where they would set up their klod on the ground. And usually they would have a lot of magical objects with them. Most of them are monks from the Songkhlā area, but there are also some from Phathalung and central Thailand. And there are people who have a high opinion of them.

At this moment, as I am writing this down, a contemplation has come to me: no matter what the school of thought is that claims to follow Buddhism – whatever it has that may strengthen and increase the defilements of the heart, that is not correct. If we proceed correctly, the defilements are curbed or diminished or dried up and brought to recede. The bottom line for practitioners is to take stock, look at ourselves, and look at our hearts. Otherwise, it will be a practice like that of the thera, who stares into the bowl. One sees him gazing and gawking and staring into the bowl before he puts his hand into the bowl to eat. And he stares and gawks, but does not know what it is good for.[234]

On the journey of the heart towards path, fruit and Nibbāna, we cannot quibble about the path that the Buddha has opened up in his great compassion. We must rebuke the heart. It is only our own mindfulness and wisdom that we invest in the path. We do not deposit any funds for cleaning and maintenance as we do with the external paths. As for the external paths, we have to continuously improve them. I would compare it to external food that someone has provided for us. There is only one thing to do: wash your hands and eat immediately. If you wait too long to eat, the food will spoil and go bad.

On the other hand, the clear path that the Awakened One has opened up, or the food that the Awakened One has prepared, that is already cooked, that is already served, that is full of nutrients: the vehicle is no longer turned on the path and the food does not spoil.

And now continuing on with the topic of the alms round, during which I crossed the town of Phang Ngā. The people who came to give something into the bowl of this Luang Phõ used to plead, "Oh, would that the devaputtas and devatā, Indra, Brahma, the gods Yama and Kāḷa and all four world protectors would take care of Phõ Than[235] and not let anything happen to him." They were over-anxious. They said the following to me. However true or false it may be, I simply present it as their story. I have nothing to gain or lose from it, and it probably really did happen. In the meditation, I placed a lot of emphasis on the *immeasurables**.[236] Well, it is probably true that a tiger living in that area would occasionally kill and drag away rubber tappers as prey, since people liked to tap rubber very early in the morning while it was still dark. They tied lanterns to their foreheads and usually started as early as three or four o'clock. The brave liked to do it that way because the rubber was not yet dry and would drip out easily.

In the middle of the night I heard a snake screaming very close by, about 15 or 16 arm spans away, but I didn't see it. Perhaps it screamed out of a hole, a burrow that went into the mountain. I didn't get to see the tiger. Or maybe it came and looked around without me knowing about it. It was a rugged valley that led into [the mountain]. But once, when I was alone having gone into seclusion on a mound of earth at Bang Nu in Takua Thung district, one came and roared very close by in a particularly self-assertive manner. When I was staying at Wat Pā Krasohm near Tanohd Suan Phrik, Takua Thung, one came out at 6 pm and sniffed around on one of the connecting paths between the kuṭis. It was a narrow path to a hut on a hill, far away from the village. When he saw me, he jumped into a thicket of elephant grass (it stank of tiger) and disappeared.

All beings who still have defilements, the imperfections of the heart must inevitably have a fear of death. Only arahants are

exempt. All others must still have varying degrees of fear. Those who have completely eradicated craving naturally have no more fear, anxiety, dread or terror. But mostly people attribute [fear] to a malfunction of the nerves or the mind. I would like to convey this to knowledgeable people by writing about Dhamma at a high level. I am not making any kind of claim[237] or taking sides here. Because that's what conceit and arrogance grow out of, and they inevitably lead to a fall. Grasping is hard to uproot.

Ācān mountain teaches a lesson

When I had been in Kan Cave for about two months, the heart formations thought that I would like to cross Thõy Mountain to Āo Luek, into the district of the "deep bay" in Krabī province. So I asked a lay follower, "My dear lay follower, I came here to stay and I feel well, everything is fine. But time is flying by. I am thinking of moving on to Āo Luek district. Does this mountain, which stands in our way, have a point where one can cross over it?" He replied, "I don't really want to let the Venerable One go, because the people from the village want to bring sand here to cover the cave floor so that Phõ Than will stay here." I replied, "I am in a hurry to move on. I am concerned that otherwise I will not have the opportunity to see many places, my dear lay follower. When there is no monk here, it is more convenient for you to transport the sand. If you transport the sand while there is a monk here, it is not particularly convenient for the monk because there may be problems if women come in and out. So it is better if you do it quickly before another monk comes here." He replied, "If Phõ Than is gone, who would be glad to transport [sand] when the source of inspiration is missing because no monk is to be seen?" I replied, "Yes, in that case, just wait and see. And if in the future a monk comes again, then you can bring the sand, yes? Whatever the case, I will say my farewells as planned. It doesn't matter whether we are as far apart as heaven and earth, when we all go to the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha for refuge, it can be said that we are truly close to one another through the Dhamma. And then there are no problems between us."

Then he said, "If Phõ Than really wants to go, then I would like to invite him to come to the market with me. I will take Phõ Than on a ship. It's more practical and he will get there quickly." I asked the lay follower, "This Thõy Mountain here – I've heard stories that there are people who have crossed it on foot in both directions." He replied, "That's right. But it's very steep and very high. It will be four o'clock in the late afternoon before you reach the eastern foothills of the mountain." I replied, "In that case, I would like to try it and find out how much courage I have for life and death. Please take me there and show me the right way to cross it." After these words, he reluctantly took me there. He led me for about eight rope lengths to the foot of the climb. There, I could indeed see a very narrow path – the shortcut over the mountain. When the path was clearly visible, he said, "There is no turning off. Don't turn right or left under any circumstances." I replied, "In that case, you may turn back without concern." He raised his hands to his forehead and turned back.

And then I decided to meditate on the legs that were climbing the mountain step by step. In some places I advanced a hand span per step, in some places I needed more than one step for a hand span. In some places I advanced a finger's length per step. I had not yet reached the ridge when I had to rest, exhausted. I turned around and looked back at the path I had come up. I dug both heels into the ground, clamped the klod under my armpits, and hung the bowl diagonally over my shoulder so that it hung tight. Then I spread my hands and pushed them backwards onto the ground. My body weight was held, distributed between my heels, my backside and the palms of my hands, which were firmly pressed onto the ground. I rested in this position for about ten minutes, alleviating the physical suffering caused by the route. Then I carefully pushed myself up to a standing position and continued the climb.

Around noon, I reached the ridge, drenched in sweat. I couldn't walk on level ground for more than 15 arm spans, then it was downhill again, an awfully steep descent. And the descent was much more difficult than climbing up because I had to be extremely careful not to take a tumble. When I arrived at the foot of the mountain it was already well after 4 pm. Then I looked back at the

route that I had taken to cross the mountain. I had learned a hard lesson. I had no regrets whatsoever that it was over, and I had no desire for another crossing like it. I really had had enough. During the whole trip I had not drunk any water.

Ācān Thõy Mountain in Phang Ngā province had taught me a lesson, it had drummed a disenchantment with regard to the sea of saṁsāra into me. Ācān birth, Ācān old age, Ācān disease, Ācān death, Ācān of separation from what is desired and of disappointed hope, Ācān aniccaṁ, Ācān dukkhaṁ, Ācān anattā – these are the teachers who teach us disenchantment with regard to the round of existence, regardless of time and circumstance, but we must not be deaf and blind to this. We must always be ready to listen and contemplate, so that we can cover the costs of delusion and also the costs of non-delusion. Otherwise, we will not escape being deluded, dull, and dumb.

When I was at the bottom and arrived at the foot of the mountain, I found a rice field about three rai wide and 20 rai long.[238] Water was flowing down from the mountain. It was a small stream. [The water] was clear, clean and very fresh. In a clearing there stood a makeshift kratõp, about three metres wide and over four metres long. There was no one there, and neither were there any objects lying around. I had the thought in my heart: "If I meet the owner, I will ask his permission to rest there." But I didn't meet anyone. I rested until the exhaustion had subsided and then I bathed. I had a real sense of urgency: "I was born into suffering, dwell in suffering alone and will be alone when I go. There can be no witnesses. Only one's own heart is a witness to itself." By the time I had finished bathing it was already dusk. I bowed to the Buddha and meditated in a lying position. I had no fearful thoughts, no bold thoughts, I was in harmony. This was probably due to the qualities of seclusion. I had no companion and I had no inclination to talk about anything with a companion, to chat, to prattle, to provide mutual affirmation word for word, topic for topic, chapter for chapter. I was truly self-sufficient. The heart was truly self-sufficient. Dhamma was truly self-sufficient. Kamma was really and truly self-sufficient.

When morning came, I went for alms. There was a village of about five or six households about 20 rope lengths away to the east. After the meal, I rested. At around 3 pm, two lay people came by to chat. I asked, "Is there a cave around here?" They replied, "Yes." I asked, "How far is it?" They replied, "Not very far." I asked, "If I leave right away, will I arrive in time?" They replied, "Yes, you'll arrive in time." And then they took me there.

We came to an unwelcoming place, a gorge that led deep into the mountain. At one spot, water was seeping out. There were leeches. There were dripping stalactites. There was no path for walking meditation. The only flat place there was just five arm spans long. Dusk was already falling. The forest there was very dense and dark. There were many tracks made by forest animals that had come down to drink. At that time, it was a cremation forest, where they dragged [*(hām)*] and cast off corpses. Had I returned to the old resting place, it would have looked improper, as if I had been too afraid. So I talked to them, "Well, it's getting dark. It would take too long to build a plank bed, so please get me some leaves and spread them on the ground. Then please make me something to hang the klod on.[239] After that, you can all return home." They did as I asked, and when they had finished, they went back.

When they had gone, I set up the klod and the mosquito net, and spread a bathing cloth where they had put the leaves. The ground was flat because it was a cave in flat terrain. There were only a few stalactites. At 7 pm, I bowed to the Buddha and wanted to recite "Bāhuṁ". I was overcome by drowsiness and yawning fatigue. I had no idea where it came from. No matter what I tried to do to banish it, it simply didn't go away. So I investigated: "I am here in a place full of shortcomings and dangers. Why am I so unusually sleepy and tired? In any case, I will make a resolution in the Dhamma and then lie down, raising my hands in añjali coupled with the thought: by the power of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, I will be a friend and companion to all in all three worlds at all times, free from all enmity and danger, whether I am aware of it or not. I will undertake this until I have attained Nibbāna without remainder." Then I lay down, focusing my attention on *Buddho*,

coupled with inhaling and exhaling. Not even five minutes had passed before I fell asleep.

Some time later than after 2 am, I awoke with a start. Little red ants, *mot ngām*, were biting me because the ground was so wet. I thought: "I'm not really predisposed to being a heavy sleeper. Now I've slept like a pig. It's because of the stuffy air. The element heap can't defend itself against it." I took a piece of cloth, brushed the ants off my body and turned my mind to meditation. But again I nodded off. But then I realised that I hadn't thought of trying to focus on inner light as an object of meditation for banishing tiredness. And it is typical for this guy here that he had no particular training in focusing on this inner light as an object of meditation. That was the reason why I hadn't thought of it. In the realm of tranquillity of mind, I had so far concentrated mainly on ānāpānassati as the anchor. Even when contemplating the three characteristics, I had relied on ānāpāna as the main method.

Out of compassion, the Buddha had even had to instruct the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna, who was meditating and dozing[240] near the village of Kallavālaputta in the kingdom of Magadha. He taught skilful ways for overcoming fatigue using various methods. So I had completely forgotten that. But then it was as if I had prepared a medicine that did not fit the illness and which immediately worsened [the symptoms] so that I finally succumbed to fatigue.[241] If a tiger or a snake had come that night, or something else that causes death in a very fresh and very quick way, and if I had turned my heart to something inappropriate – yes, then I would have had a problem.

Encounter with a large snake

In the morning I packed my things and prepared to move on. I passed their village. They ran to meet me and I said to them, "The air is very stuffy and the place is also very cramped. It is still too early to go for alms in this village. If I go further in this direction, will I come across a village or not? And will there be a more favourable place to stay or not?" They replied, "You must go to Khao Thao

Mountain because there is a rock shelter there, a plank bed too. You can go to Bān Khao Thao for alms, but by the time you get there, it will be very late." – "Ah, it doesn't matter if I get there a little later. Please lead me to the right path, my dear lay followers." They accompanied me for about 20 rope lengths. We crossed a raging, but only knee-deep stream that flowed down from Thõy Mountain. It was about six metres wide. Then I told them they could turn back.

When I arrived at Khao Thao it was already about ten o'clock. There was someone there who took me straight to the cave, so I didn't go for alms at all, seeing as the time for that had already passed. He knew that I hadn't eaten yet, but I forestalled him by saying, "I don't really need to eat today. I don't want to inconvenience you lay people. After all, I have spooked in[242] here at the wrong time." He didn't accept that and brought a lunch pail.[243] So I took out my alms bowl so that he could put something in it. Then, just for his sake, I ate nine or ten bites. He said, "Long ago, monks from Phathalung and Songkhlā were once here, but they didn't stay long because there were so many monks and there wasn't enough space." We talked for about 20 minutes, then he went back. Because people lived in their own rice fields and orchards, the houses were spread far apart. In those days there were hardly any thieves or other criminals either, but nowadays, due to the conflicts, this may no longer be the case.[244]

The place at Khao Thao where one could stay was a rock overhang above flat, level ground. But the overhang was very high at the top and formed a wide protruding roof. The ground below was flat, and on it stood a plank bed for sleeping, about 40 centimetres high. They had built a shrine for a spirit cult, a *krathõm**, also called a kratõp or *kranam**, a little way from the plank bed. It was close to the rock wall at a spot where a hole the diameter of a bucket led into that wall. They called that mountain the Mountain of Khao Thao Cave, Khao Thao municipality, Phang Ngā province.

On the day of my arrival, the first thing I did was to rest on the plank bed. I lay down to give the body a little rest at around 1 pm. Then a large snake came slithering in from the north. It came along the rock wall passing the boulders under the rock shelter. Its head

almost touched the head of the plank bed. It stretched its neck upwards as it crept along. It stretched its neck upwards about 50 centimetres. It came very deliberately, very slowly. Its eyes were the size of thumbs. I sat up, sitting in a sideways position. Its head was about an ell away from the plank bed. Its body was about four metres long, and more than ten centimetres in diameter. It raised its head and blinked gently.

Then a sudden thought occurred to me, and while waving my hand, I said to it, "Go, go, go, go! Slip away that way! What business do you have with me? I send you mettā every day. I have nothing against you at all. To everything that has consciousness, everywhere in the three worlds, I want to be a friend and companion, always free from all enmity and danger. At the same time, I always share all my merit and the fruits of my beneficial actions, so that all may receive only the purest wellbeing, whether they are aware of it or not … all the way to the attainment of Nibbāna without remainder. Now go, go, go, go!"

And then it really did turn right, slithering straight under the kratõp where they practised their spirit cult. It raised its head very deliberately and crept forward very slowly in this posture, as if it were proceeding mindfully. Its head was about two arm spans away from the plank bed, but the end of its tail was still close to the plank bed. Then it let out a series of sounds: "Hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo." Its belly rose and fell as it let out these sounds. Then it disappeared silently into the hole in the rock wall. I thought to myself: "It was probably out looking for food, but instead it ran into me."

After about ten minutes it came back out, straight towards the foot of the plank bed. As before, it raised its head and approached very deliberately. When it was a little more than an arm's length out of the hole, I started talking with more determination than the first time and waved it back with my hand. I said, "Go, go, go, go! Back, back! I have already said that to you, but you don't listen. As I said before, I did not come here to dig up treasures from the earth or from the water. Back, back, back, back!" Always waving my hand at the same time. When it retreated, it slithered backwards for

about a hand span, then it swung its tail around and disappeared into that hole.

Why had it come out of the hole so quickly? Perhaps it wanted to go to the edge of the rice fields to look for food, and because of the power of Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, and because I didn't have any enmity or harm for it in mind, it had not bitten me or eaten me or done anything dangerous to me. This was no demon, no ghost, no fairy and no deva that had taken the form [of a snake]. Perhaps one could see it as a partner in developing the pāramis[245] who wanted to test me to see if and how much fear I had, or whether I would have had thoughts of looking for a wooden club to kill it, or something along those lines for example. That would certainly be possible.

The outer snake is not as significant as the inner snake – namely the defilements of the heart that coil themselves around the heart. This is the truly significant snake: when one succumbs to greed and anger and is unable to reduce or overcome delusion. From stream-entry onwards, this snake can no longer wrap itself around the heart so tightly, can no longer constrict the mind so tightly. As soon as one can breathe easily, one sees the way, one understands how to defeat the snake in the future. Below that level one remains stuck in the deadly jaws of the inner snake.

In the morning, I got up and went for alms at just two houses because the houses here were very far apart, each near their orchards and rice fields. But I still received enough to eat. One of the lay followers followed me and brought even more food. I asked him, "Khuṇ lay follower, are there snakes around here?" He asked back, "Phõ Than has seen one, hasn't he?" I replied, "Yes, I saw one." He asked, "How big was it?" I replied, "Well, as thick as my shin there." He replied, "There are also larger ones, as thick as a thigh." I asked him, "Can it bite? Does it have venom?" He replied, "It can bite, and it has a lot of venom, second [in strength] only to the cobra. But it doesn't usually bite. It's quite greedy when it comes to food." I asked him, "What is the name of this snake?" He said, "It's called the Bõng Lā snake,[246] with respect. It has been here for a long time. It is a snake with supernatural powers, but it doesn't harm anyone."

Before I met the snake, I had only intended to stay there for about three days, but after I had encountered it and told him about it, it was necessary for me to stay longer. For one thing, because I wanted to work on my character traits, and secondly, I feared that otherwise he would think that this thudong monk was too afraid. I stayed for another week and didn't see the snake again. There was only a tiger that had passed by about 15 arm spans away. The layman told me that he had seen its tracks, but this guy here didn't go with him to look at them. So I thought to myself: "If the kamma of dying has not yet really arrived, if it is still the kamma of being alive, then it must be possible to survive for a while. Nevertheless, one cannot escape death." In a deeper sense, the tiger of the defilements builds its house, its city, and thus surrounds the city of the heart.

The word tiger, *suea*, also means "a person who still has anger with a tendency to violence". One who only looks after his own wallet. Only the non-returner escapes the tiger's jaws of anger. Below that level, you can't escape the tiger's jaws of anger at all. When we have turned to the internal states, the *ajjhattā dhammā*, the issue of the external tiger becomes tolerable and we can relax our obsession with it. The super-evil of the internal tiger is able to take hold of the body and speech. This leads to the committing of the five types of immediate kamma.

That is why having the five or the eight precepts as a starting point is the root for fulfilling all ethical practice.[247] If we have violated the first of the ethical rules, the other ethical rules will join in and will also be violated. If, on the other hand, we are able to keep the first of the ethical rules, the other ethical rules will also join in and be fulfilled, because we have received the lifeline of ethics, which includes kindness, a heart of kindness, Dhamma of kindness. After all, we have made the decision and anchored it in our hearts, in the Dhamma, not to kill anything or anyone, regardless of the person. This is the disposition of a benevolent being because we have already recognised Dhamma as being the essence. We no longer consider ourselves or the world to be more important than any aspect of Dhamma. Those who fulfil the five precepts have brought their inner wealth to fullness, that treasure of the noble

ones. Therefore, for one who fulfils these five ethical rules, ethics will be transformed into supermundane ethics. This marks the beginning of the holy life in the Buddha's teaching.

Deep Bay and Laem Sak

I stayed there for as long as seemed appropriate. After seven days I took my leave from them and went to Bõ Saen, to "Hundred Thousand Well". I boarded a rowboat and travelled for two hours, barely making it to the edge of Phang Ngā province. It was a corridor of land that connected to Krabī province. I spent the night on the beach in a tiny hut, a kranam. I asked one of the locals, "What do the words Hundred Thousand Well refer to?" He answered bluntly, "A hundred thousand times the suffering and a hundred thousand problems, nah, Phõ Than." I gave him full marks, "Very good! You have answered without deviating from the principles of Dhamma." I stayed there for three nights, said goodbye, and then continued on to Āo Luek, the "deep bay" in Krabī province.

In the middle of the night, at one o'clock, someone came, took my requisites and put me on board a rowing boat. It was high tide at the time. They rowed the boat against the onshore current. Jumping fish made slapping noises. We followed the edge of a forest along the coast of the inland sea. The boat docked at the pier of the district capital of Āo Luek. Then the crew of about seven men carried [(hāb)] melons ashore to sell in Āo Luek. That was around four o'clock, as to my guess. Shortly after they had unloaded the melons, heavy rain set in, though the wind was not blowing strongly. And so I stood there at the pier with my bowl around my shoulders, holding up my klod. I waited for about an hour. It was pitch black all around, I couldn't see a thing. I thought to myself: "It's is as if Ācān rain wants to test me by forcing me to do standing meditation with my klod held up high." Somehow it was quite funny.

It was getting light, a new day dawned, and I was preparing for the alms round in the district capital of Āo Luek. From the jetty to the town it was a little more than 30 rope lengths. Just before I had

reached the houses, a lay follower came and helped me carry the things; he took the water kettle and the klod from me.

He said, "Thudong monks from Phūket, Khohk Klõy, Phang Ngā have been staying in a coconut plantation on the outskirts of the town for several days. I would like to accompany Phõ Than on alms round and then take Phõ Than there so that he can eat with those thudong monks." Then I went for alms until I had enough food to fill me up. After that, we went to see the venerable monks who were just preparing their bowls for the meal. We looked at each other and started laughing. We were actually from the same group, having only spent the rains retreat in different samnaks. When we had finished eating, washing our bowls and stowing our utensils, we talked and chatted until we had run out of topics.

Around noon, a man from Laem Sak municipality in Āo Luek district came by. He was travelling with a ship crammed with 200 people. He had heard about the thudong monks who had been staying in a coconut plantation in Āo Luek district for several days. He was also coming to buy goods in the Āo Luek district capital. And he wanted to ask the monks if they would go into seclusion close to his home village. At that time there were five monks there, myself included, who had only just arrived that day: Than Ācān Āt, Than Ācān Brohmā, Khuṇ Subin, Khuṇ Caroen. Then he offered his invitation to the assembled saṅgha, "I ask the Than Ācāns to send a few monks for my people. No matter how many monks, and no matter which monks, I will agree to it." A decision was made, and so he got me. Then he took my luggage. I said goodbye to the Khrū Bā Ācāns as well as the circle of friends and set off. And this guy here was also very happy with it.

We walked about two kilometres before reaching the jetty at Laem Sak, "cape teakwood". In the evening I boarded the ship. We travelled for about an hour before reaching the village of Laem Sak. It was dusk, and by about 7 pm it was dark. It was high tide. I was taken to a kratõp on the side of the river where the school was located. There were lots of monitor lizards, cobras and vipers. I stayed there for almost a month. It was as secluded as I could have wished for. The lay followers were as pleasant as I could have wished for.

Mr. Manūn, Mother Nui and Mother Chomā made sure that I felt comfortable. The alms round was convenient, not particularly far, not particularly near. It was quiet and secluded.

The lay people from the samnak in Phang Ngā, where I had spent the rains retreat, had found out that I was there and sent me a letter inviting me to return. So I wrote a letter in reply to the monastic community containing the following:

"Temporary place of residence on the coast, Bān Laem Sak, Laem Sak municipality, d. Āo Luek, p. Krabī, day… month… year 1953.

Respectful greetings to the venerable theras and anutheras and all in the monastic community, with the highest esteem. On my journey into seclusion, I am moving further and further away and will probably not return at all. It's all my fault. I ask for your understanding.

With the expression of my deepest respect

Lā Khemapatto"

I addressed the envelope as follows: "Message to all venerable theras and anutheras at Wat Pā Khohk Klõy, Nā Klāng municipality, Dist. Takua Thung, Prov. Phang Ngā. After reading, please pass on to Wat Pā Khao To' Sae', Phūket. This will be a great blessing."

In the letter to those lay people from Phang Ngā, I recorded the place and date and wrote:

"Progress in Dhamma, dear lay people from Phang Ngā, who share both joys and sorrows with all the venerable ones in the forest monastery, whom you respect so much. I have sought out seclusion and will probably not return. Although we are separated, we always have Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha in our hearts. I firmly believe that we are close in the Dhamma. With the expression of my continued respect for the Buddha's teaching, I remain

Lā Khemapatto."

So much for the topic of the formations of separation. Well, that's just the way it is.

In the cremation forest near Trang

After I had stayed there for almost a month, I said goodbye to them and boarded a ship which crossed the deep bay, Āo Luek, and then spent a night in Nõng Cik. Someone put me on a rubber truck to the provincial capital Krabī. When I arrived there, it was already getting dark. I was dropped off outside the city in the machine hall of a coffee roasting plant to spend the night. An unmarried man lived there alone. It was a spacious place with many rooms.

After getting up in the morning, someone sat me in the car of the owner [of the roastery]. He brought me two cups of milk, and so I drank one of them. At six o'clock the car set off. We passed through the district of Khlõng Thõm. When we reached the district of Huay Yõd, it was already eleven o'clock. The driver took a break for about 30 minutes. He wanted to get something to eat to offer me. I said to him, "I only eat one meal a day. I already had a glass of milk at six o'clock. I am not suffering any hunger." Then it was time again; the car sped on and reached Trang province shortly after 2 pm. I went to stay in a cremation forest, about a kilometre from the train station. A lay follower brought me a bast mat to spread out on the bare ground under a tree. There was also a bucket of water. I hung my klod on one of the tree branches. I placed the headrest in the direction of the pit. Corpses that were not yet due to be cremated were properly covered with earth here. They do not use branches and thorny bushes to shield them, as is the case in Īsān.

In the realm of meditation, I placed the emphasis on mettā as a parikamma, regardless of the time of day or night. For the most part I had been doing this since [my time in] Kan Cave, in Phang Ngā province. I sent [mettā] out until I reached the anattā mind; anattā Dhamma, in which there is no hostility, no danger, no enemies. But the benefit for myself was also immediately apparent. Because when the stream of the mind wishes no harm to anyone, mindfulness can be easily anchored; it does not get outwardly distracted. I focused my mind in this way: "I wish that in the future [all beings in] all four types of birth[248] will always fare well in this way in Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha." I didn't have to force myself to do this.

When I lay down, I reserved the time before falling asleep for breathing in and out together with the mettā-parikamma.

After getting up the next morning, when it was time, I went for alms in the town. In the afternoon, around five o'clock, a smart and healthy looking Chinese man, about 30 years old appeared. He came to me, bowed, and asked, "De venlaben slept heea, did he seeya ne ghose?" Answer: "Haven't seen any at all." Question: "Did he seeya snay, lah? Here meni vaipa." Answer: "Haven't seen any." Question: "An, an where wong venlaben goha nex, lah?" Answer: "I want to go to Bangkok." Question: "How, howa de venlaben wong to tlavel, lah?" Answer: "I plan to go on foot and to be in Nakhõn Śī Thammarāt before the rains retreat and to spend the retreat in Rõn Phibūn." The Chinese man continued, "But dhaat iit veli faah, issen ee!" Answer: "It's a long way, but I'll get there bit by bit. Wherever darkness falls, that's where I'll stay for the night." The Chinese man continued, "If, if is likea dhaat I will, will gip da venlablen some money." Answer: "I cannot accept, own or use money." The Chinese man continued, "If, if is likea dhaat dhen gip me your mong idenity documen. I will buya expret tlain ticke for youa. Da advan ticke go on sale ata 6 pm." I thought hard for a moment and came to the conclusion that he didn't seem like the kind of person who would want to boil me. So I gave him the monk's identity document. He rode off on his bike.

It didn't take long for him to come back. He gave me my monk's identity document and a ticket for the express train, second-class compartment, 62 baht 50 satāng. Then he asked, "Foo, foo, where will you eata, lah?" Answer: "I am used to enduring hunger." He replied, "If, if is likea dhaat, no ploblem. Tomollow, tomollow you dohn hava to go ona alm roun. De tlain depart early, no time for alm roun. So wait foa me at de tlain stayshen. I will mee you dhere." With that, all was said and he rode home.

Question: Why had this Chinese man been visiting the cremation forest? Answer: His father had been taken by kamma and, for the time being, been buried and covered with earth. He had brought incense sticks and candles, lit them and used them to pay homage to his father's virtues. He was about to throw himself into the pre-

parations for the cremation. It is Chinese custom that the children should distinguish themselves through their respect for the virtues of their parents. This aspect is very much in line with the instructions of the Buddha's teaching. That is why the Chinese hardly ever falter in their conduct. As a rule, they are influential and honourable people. There are extremely few Chinese convicts in Thailand's prisons.

In what follows, I will give a report of the journey. When the time came the next morning, and after I had splashed myself with water from the lay follower's bucket, I said goodbye to him and went to the train station to wait until I could board the train. When I arrived at the station before seven o'clock, the stationmaster received me, took me to his office and offered me a chair. The stationmaster showed his respect for monks in a manner that was in no way lacking in inspiration. He did not accept that monks should have to mingle with lay people outside. A moment later, two Chinese, a married couple, saw me and immediately entered the office. They took my luggage. He said, "Please, please! I sen my son aheada to occupy a place ina secon class." The man hung my bowl around his neck, the woman shouldered my klod. I left the office with no further fuss and got on the train.

He handed me the requisites and offered me a bag of rice, three dried fish and three eggs, two sachets of gold-flake medicine.[249] Plus two glass bottles of water. He stowed everything on the luggage rack above my seat. He put the two bottles under the seat. Then I asked him, "When I have drunk the water, what should I do with the bottles?" He said, "When you finishe de water, you cana thlow de bottles ou de wingdow or thlow dem awaya ona de tlain. If someone wans dem, you cana give dem to dem, donna wahly!" Then the Chinese man wrote his name out in Thai script. His name was Damchai Cingcit, and he lived on Rāchadamnoen Road, Trang. We talked until everything was said, and before long a bell rang – ding, ding, ding. The train sounded a horn. I gave a short blessing and they raised their hands to their foreheads [in añjali] and got off the train.

The train slowly started moving. After leaving the station, it really picked up speed. I sat in the train with dangling legs, and meditated. The mind felt quite unburdened. The trains on the southern line were not as packed with passengers as the trains on the lines to Chiang Mai, Ubon and Udõn. And the passengers were not dull either. When they saw a monk all alone on the train without the company of lay people, they provided him with food and were in no way uninvolved.

At around eleven o'clock we reached Thung Song in Nakhõn Śī Thammarāt province. I had to get off there and wait for about 30 minutes. The train that had come up from Trang waited for the connecting train, the express train from Songkhlā, which continued on to Bangkok. And the train from Trang turned off and went down to Songkhlā.

Railway track, heart track, Dhamma track

Just before I got off the train at Thung Song, I asked a passenger to offer me the food bag that [the donor] had placed on the luggage rack.[250] I was ready early because I already knew this part of the route. I had travelled this route previously on my way down to Phūket. When I was waiting at Thung Song for the train from Songkhlā, I quickly ate four or five bites out of compassion for the couple who had given it to me in Trang. The rest I gave to the stationmaster.

This raises the question as to whether another ticket had to be issued. That was not the case, because the ticket issued was already valid for the route from Trang to Bangkok Nõi station. All those who had travelled in that carriage did not need to have another ticket issued in Thung Song. It wasn't long before the express train from Songkhlā appeared, signalling with its horn. I quickly got into the second class carriage as before. It stopped for about 10 minutes, then it went up to Bangkok. The train from Trang went down to Songkhlā. And they turned their rear lights towards each other.

Yes, such a train follows an external track of steel on its journey. But when this heap of matter and mind guides the train of

meditation and continues to follow the track of development, it arrives at the departure station for the supramundane. That is the station of the stream-enterer. The second station is the station of the once-returner. The third station is the station of the non-returner. The fourth station is the station of the arahant. And there are no tickets issued for the return journey either. Not like the outer stations and the outer vehicles made of steel, wood, earth, water, fire, wind. All these have to be revised and contemplated; otherwise, it would become mere animal talk, because it would then only be about topics from the village, about cities, cars, vehicles and so on. A wise man who comes across this while reading would laugh at it. [Contemplation] is the cause for recognising the level of the mind, the heart, the Dhamma: What level are they at? It is worth thinking about.

Writing, reading, speaking, doing. If we forget ourselves, forget our inner being, forget our hearts, forget this Dhamma and then write little, read little, speak little and do little, then we do only a little wrong. If we write, read, speak and act a lot, then we do a lot wrong. And conversely, if we do not forget ourselves, do not forget our inner being, do not forget our hearts, do not forget this Dhamma, and then write, read, speak and act a little, then we do little right. If we write, read, speak and act a lot, then we do a lot right.

The many realms of right and wrong are, of course, vassals of the kingdom of the heart – a kingdom of the heart that is not made up of mindfulness and wisdom. The kingdom of the heart that is made of mindfulness and wisdom, a realm that is not wrong and not right and is not entangled in the two knots of right and wrong, is a vassal of Nibbāna. But Nibbāna does not proclaim itself as any kind of home or realm. For Nibbāna does not come and enslave itself to watch over right and wrong and over any kind of home or realm.

The poison tuber becomes edible when it has been thoroughly watered and washed. The taste, which was itchy and acrid, has no way of returning to being enslaved by the poison tuber once it has been watered and well washed. This point is, of course, true even if

nothing more is written, read or considered in regard to it, and it remains true in this way. The truth does not deviate from the truth at this level. Truth does not escape from truth. If we reduce this to the extreme, we get two [aspects]: truth in the mundane sense and truth in the supramundane sense. On the supramundane path, it branches out into eight, corresponding to the stages of the path and fruit.

The truth does not deviate from the truth on the worldly path. On the good path it branches out into four categories: humans who are complete in their being human, who are not crazy or idiots or maladjusted, and who do not deviate from the norm; heaven; the Deva World; the Brahma World (but do not forget that there are noble ones mixed in with them too; with the exception of Nibbāna without remainder).

The share of truth that does not deviate from the truth, on the worldly side, on the low path, includes humans who are crazy, idiotic or maladjusted; animals; the beings of hell; and all kinds of hungry ghosts. But don't forget that these beings are accumulating the pāramis to varying degrees. For example, the Venerable Devadatta will become a paccekabuddha. The elephant Pārileyyaka will become a paccekabuddha. They have, after all, received a prophecy to this effect from the sammāsambuddha.

If someone wants to claim that the author is emotionally crazy, that's fine by me. But there are also those who are crazy in a dry way. Since we are already on the subject of craziness, it all depends on how many defilements there are. If one wanted to claim that it depends solely on the heart and mind, then no clarity could be achieved. To claim that a heart without defilements is crazy is, of course, not in accordance with Dhamma. (The arahant is completely out of the picture because they are cured of delusion, cured of all craziness, free from dark and dumb Dhamma, dim Dhamma.)[251]

But it is also not appropriate to say of a noble person that they are crazy. This is extremely unwholesome because it is coarse, vulgar speech. And this goes for stream-entry and up. The definition of what craziness is must have some limits. Otherwise one would be deviating from right speech and losing self-control.

At eleven o'clock I boarded the train at Thung Song station. When it arrived at Bangkok Nõi station, it was ten o'clock. I got off the train and asked a policeman at the boat landing. The policeman put me on a boat to cross over to Phra Can Pier. A trishaw driver pushed his bicycle rickshaw over to pick me up. I said, "Thank you very much, but I have no means of paying you because I can't possess money." He replied, "Even if you have no money, that doesn't matter, I will drive you. I follow the Buddha's teaching. I am from Ayuthayā and my name is Śrī Bunrueang. My parents are also Buddhists. Which monastery do you want to go to?" I answered, "To Wat Bõromnivās." I got on and we talked along the way. He said, "How about going to Wat Duang Khae?" I replied, "I don't know anyone at that Wat Duang Khae. At Wat Bõromnivās I know many monks. I've been there twice before." He asked, "How do we get there?" Answer: "We cross the Yot Se Bridge, then turn left at the fork to the monastery. I will stay overnight in the kuṭi at the turtle pond." Then he chatted further, "Where has Than Ācān come from?" Answer: "Phūket, Phang Ngā, but not by the direct route. By the time I finally arrived in Trang I had already spent two months living in seclusion here and there. A generous layman put me on the express train, and so I ended up at the Bangkok Nõi train station. A policeman put me on a boat that took me over to this side of the river. And that's where it happened that I met another generous person." The tricycle driver continued, "When the Venerable One said that he had no money in his wallet, it gave me goosebumps because it was so inspiring. Usually, I only see monks who all have a lot of money in their wallets."

When we reached the Yot Se Bridge, his passenger dismounted and went on foot because I felt sorry for him having to push his vehicle up the hill.[252] Although he said it wasn't necessary, and against his will, I dismounted, and then I said to him, "I have in mind to be considerate. If you are such a deep person, then I have to show some depth too. Otherwise, I would not be in accordance with the Dhamma." Coincidentally, not a single vehicle passed us at that moment. When we reached the highest point of the arch, I got back on for a while. Then we turned left and arrived at the kuṭi at

the turtle pond. He raised his hands to his forehead and I gave him a short blessing. Then he rode back as best he could.

At that moment, monks from my circle of friends saw me and called out to me, "Where have you come from so late in the day? Where did you eat?" I replied, "Passengers on the train invited me to eat on the train." They asked, "Where did you get the money for him, then?" I answered, "I ran into him at Phra Can Pier. I told him that I had no money. So he brought me here free of charge, despite the suffering and difficulties. That's how it was." The mahās said, "Yes, that's good. Coming here in this way is fine." Then the bowing and the exchange of news followed. When everything had been said, we went our separate ways. Everyone spent their time independently of one another.

I stayed there for about six days. For alms I went alone on the road behind the Sra Pathum Palace and on Petchaburī Road. Also going into the side streets and alleys. I had my meal together with that group of mahās, but I only ate one meal a day. And there was a lot of leftover rice in my bowl. I kept it for their schoolchildren. To the mahās I said, "I am used to eating out of the bowl like this. But this is up to each person. I don't leave more rice and other dishes in the bowl than the size of a duck egg. You mahās use a communal spoon. This is really practical because it doesn't get covered in someone else's spit. I have already put the communal spoon back into my bowl to scoop out food, but that's okay. After all, we all come from Īsān. Our parents mostly raised us on a standard meal of sticky rice and fermented stinky fish."[253] We spoke quite casually with each other because the monks in that kuti by the turtle pond had fewer rains than I had, Mahā Phathai being the only exception. I had, however, been close friends with Mahā Phathai since the time I had stayed in Udõn in 1945. As far as I could tell from the polite way we treated each other, they had no objection to this guy. The polite way we treated each other was above suspicion.

Another important story that came to my mind, and that I should therefore write down and insert, is the following. Luang Pū Mun had a great deal of respect for the study of Dhamma and for

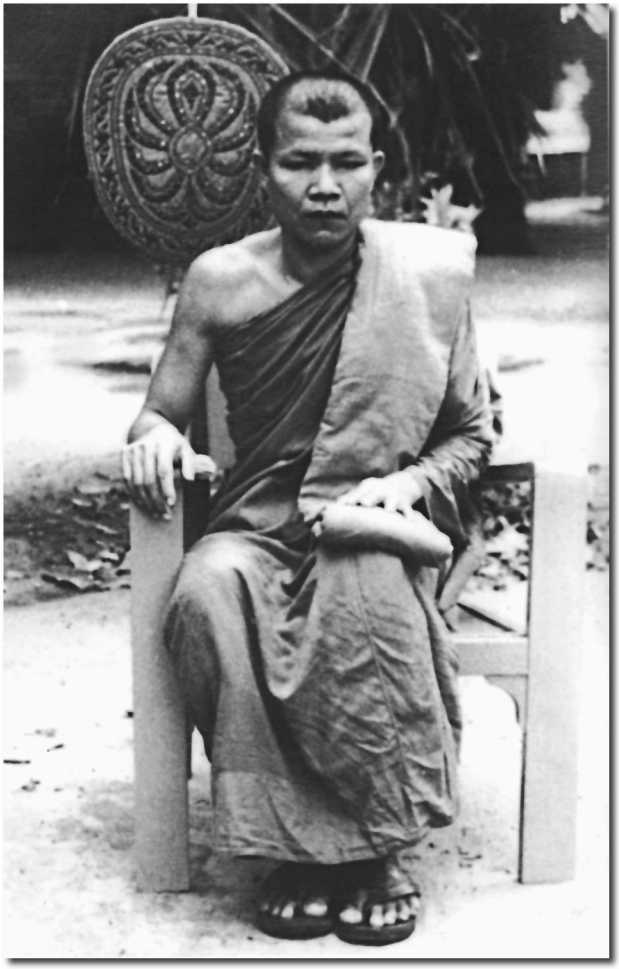
the theras and anutheras on the scholarly side. In the Bān Nõng Phue, Sakon Nakhõn period, he had once said:

"This *Somdet** Phra Mahāsamaṇa Cao[254] has a really great deal of full and huge fluency in Dhamma and Vinaya. And there are other eminences who have just as much fluency. If the scholars in Dhamma had not translated [the texts of the canon] into Thai, we, who have had little education, would not know what they actually mean. Study, practice and realisation cannot be separated from one another. Skin, flesh, tendons and bones are interdependent. Likewise, study, practice and realisation are interdependent. These three aspects of the true teaching can in no way be separated from one another. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī from Udõn Thānī was inclined to study, so I let him study.[255] But in the past, there were also some among my children and grandchildren who said they wanted to study. And I also provided them with all manner of books. But when it came to studying, they lacked determination and the right attitude. And so they were unable to devote themselves to practice, nor could they study. Finally, they abandoned the training [in the monastic life] altogether, and left in droves."

But the kammic predisposition and the workings of kamma are a personal matter. Kamma and its fruits are, by nature, the shadow that follows all those who are still travelling in saṁsāra. Nibbāna is completely exempt from this. Nibbāna does not come and make itself the slave of kamma and its consequences, like a prison guard. Nibbāna is Dhamma that is already beyond cause and effect. It is not the watchman waiting to enforce cause and effect. Nibbāna has nothing to do with the form heap and nothing to do with the name heap; for the form heap and the name heap belong to the formations. It may be possible to describe one who has escaped the formations in terms of "elements", "things", "sense spheres" or even "faculties", but such a person is not caught up in the accumulation of name-and-form. That is why the arahant cannot be found in the pile of name-and-form known as the five khandhas. The accumulation of name-and-form is the route of contemplation towards disenchantment, towards the dissolution of delusion.

Back to Īsān (1953-57)

The noble ones are determined on the supramundane path. This determination cannot be measured by what is boastfully passed off as determination below it.



Phra Ācān Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno, 1950

Back to Īsān

Return to Īsān

During my stay at Wat Bõromnivās, Phra Mahā Vichay wanted to cover my travelling expenses up to Udõn, but I asked him to set this aside, and said that up to Ayuthayā would be enough. I had in mind to visit Than Chaluay's forest monastery,[256] and travelling on a normal train would be sufficient, there was no need to take the express train. He told a temple boy to put me on a freight train with third-class compartments. The fare to Ayuthayā was 2 baht 50 satāng. I stayed in Ayuthayā for three days. Partly in Than Chaluay's forest monastery, and partly in a tiny kratõp that someone had brought me to. Someone took me to see the museum in the old royal palace, where there were Buddha statues made of stone with a chest diameter of about 40 centimetres, and whose heads had been broken off cleanly. They had been scattered around everywhere ever since some ancient war, a pitiful memorial for contemplation with growing weariness of saṁsāra.

Humans are all innately determined. Determination can be narrowed down to two directions: determination on the path that produces hostility and danger, and determination on the path that produces no hostility or danger. The noble ones are determined on the supramundane path. This determination cannot be measured by what is boastfully passed off as determination below it.

The fruits of determined action naturally follow the determined one on every level. [These actions] bear fruit in different ways, depending on the degree of the essence of the cause, the action, the plant, the behaviour which one spreads, plants, builds, based on a quality that one can call slavery to determination, with no reason to resist or question it. It doesn't even matter whether one believes in kamma and its fruits or not, whether one follows the Buddha's teaching or not, or in which world, in which era [one lives]: kamma

and the fruits of kamma lead to the reward or retribution of such action, because the mental action is the beginning of the chain of causes of all action.

And of course it has its effects, partly in this life, partly in the next life, partly in sequence, partly according to the tasks at hand, partly in a later birth, in a later life, according to the value of the created cause, whether much or little, whether it is the right path or the wrong path that is conditioned by a cause in the heart, the big boss that is constantly producing something. Whether the heart is aware of itself or not is not the question. If the heart and its effects no longer existed, there would be no one to have reservations about the practice of the heart.

One who resists kamma and its fruits, in this, the next or a later existence, has exactly the same significance, the same taste, as a blind person who wants to show off in front of a person with good eyesight while threading a needle. One who believes in kamma and its fruits and becomes acquainted with them has an eye of wisdom that is not blinded. They will look in all directions, front and back, right and left, and see clearly, unobstructed by clouds or fog. This is already sammādiṭṭhi, right view, at this level, and the days until they take the next step into high-level wisdom are numbered. The days are numbered until the suffering of the heart in the nature of the khandhas can be dispelled. [The heart] is no longer the slave of the delusion of ego. Mindfulness and wisdom destroy the darkness in the way of the next step.[257]

After I had stayed in Ayuthayā for three days, a wealthy Chinese lay follower took me to the express train. It was at eleven o'clock in the morning. Second-class compartment. The fare was half-price and totalled 48 baht and a few crumbs – I can't remember how many satāng. The carriages were joined together in a long line. When the train arrived in Udõn, it was already past eight in the morning. I stood from Ayuthayā until arrival in Udõn. The train was crammed full. This can well be described as a standing meditation with a wide-awake gaze. I got off at Udõn station and walked straight to Bān Duea with the bowl slung around my shoulders. I walked this four-kilometre stretch until I arrived at Bān Duea. My

children and nephews came and put something in my bowl at Wat Bān Duea. And I took a break to eat there. It was Luang Pū Õn Tā's temple (not the Luang Pū Õn Tā from Wat Krom Thahān). When I had finished my meal, I said goodbye to him and went to Wat Pā Nohn Nives to spend the night. I stayed for one night. In the morning after the meal I said goodbye to Luang Pū Brohmmī and went to Bān Kud Sra and to Bān Khamin. Staying one night at each place.

Then I returned to Wat Pā Nohn Nives. At daybreak Luang Pū Brohmmī claimed me and sent me to a house invitation. They were holding a fundraising event near Wat Bodhisomphõn. As for Luang Pū Brohmmī, he went to a house invitation on Māk Khaeng Road. It was a house invitation near the old hospital. That day they had – somewhat complicatedly – house invitations at two different locations.

Mettā from Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī

When I arrived at the place where the event was happening, I went into the pavilion where a ceremony was taking place. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī looked in my direction and saw me. He waved his hand and had me sit at the head of the row, diagonally across from him, with my back to the lay people. Then he asked, "Where are you staying?" Answer: "Wat Pā Nohn Nives." Question: "How many nights already?" Answer: "Two nights already, with respect." Question: "You have come from Phūket, Phang Ngā, haven't you?" Answer: "Yes." Question: "Why did you run away from there?" Answer: "Because the place is not particularly favourable. The area is constricting, if I may say so." Question: "Tell me, why didn't you come to my place to stay overnight?" Answer: "Because I am quite busy visiting with the relatives at the moment." He said sympathetically, "All right, I'll send a monastery helper with you when we're done here. He will help you bring your requisites. You'll stay with me." There were no further questions. Then he said, "Use this spoon to fill your alms bowl with both rice and other dishes. Then you can eat out of the alms bowl as you usually do. You need not take me into consideration. I find thudong monks who don't like to eat from the alms bowl totally boring." In my bowl, I only put things that

were not liquid: rice and other dishes, and not as much as the size of a fist. For I was determined not to make a mess of my alms bowl and to leave only a single bite.[258]

A little over ten theras were there, all of them heads of monasteries. The Cao Khuṇ from Nõng Khāi was there too. This guy here had never sat diagonally across from such prominent and eminent people at the head of the row and found it amusing, somehow funny. I noticed that 'Bāhuṁ' was not recited and no blessing was given. But maybe I was just a little too late. It's quite possible that they had already done it. There were about 70 lay people present. When the Venerable Dhammacedī said I should start eating, I concentrated on eating. When we had finished, he sent a boy to help me bring my requisites to his monastery.

I thought to myself: "This ordination father of mine knows the character of his children and he gives them warmth. There is no intimidation whatsoever. He speaks as a father would to his children and grandchildren. We interact as if we have known each other for many lifetimes. But I do not lose my restraint and do not allow this familiarity to degenerate into disrespect. For normally, no matter how familiar practitioners may be with their monastic elders, the obligation to respect them must remain. Bad behaviour and a loose tongue, like a dog towards its master, is simply not acceptable."

This Dhamma has existed in its essence since time immemorial and it will not change or disappear in the future. Those who draw upon it and apply it are sure to be on the right track. It is a Dhamma that never grows stale. But some practitioners tend to forget themselves, to forget their hearts, to forget the Dhamma when they have contact with their father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, both paternal and maternal, upajjhāya and *ācariya*,* that is too familiar. They tend to put themselves on the same level as them, and they lack respect. You see them everywhere, they populate the whole world. They are not ashamed. I have no words for it, but they don't listen anyway. Luang Pū Mahā warned me in this regard again and again, back in the days of Nõng Phue with Luang Pū Mun. And I've remembered it well and am not in the least bit willing to forget it. So I am writing it down as my legacy to my children

and grandchildren, who are keen on the good in the future. Otherwise, the teaching in this paragraph, which is pure Dhamma flesh, would have no bones in it. And then it would disappear from the world. Then there would only be sons and daughters of good families who pile up vanity and arrogance and brag about how good they are.

After spending a night at Wat Bodhisomphõn, Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī put me in a car to drive down to Sakon Nakhõn. After spending the night in Suddhāvās, I travelled on foot, staying one night at Wat Pā Bān Khohk with Phra Ācān Un. After that I spent about seven days at Wat Dõi Dhammacedī, helping Luang Pū Kongmā a little with collecting firewood. I said goodbye and went to Wat Pā Bān Nā Sohk, where I stayed for about seven days. The novice Soh from Bān Nā Sohk wanted to go to Huay Sāi with me. So I said to him, "If nehn wants to go there, then only after me, not with me, because otherwise it would reflect badly on me. It would look as if I had a nehn with me whom I had poached from someone else."

The nehn said, "I want to study with Phra Ācān Mahā Bua in Wat Pā Huay Sāi. For years I have heard nothing but good things about him, and so my curiosity has grown." At that time Luang Phõ Ming was living in Wat Pā Bān Nā Sohk with two novices, namely Nehn Dā and Nehn Soh. So I talked to Luang Phõ:

"Luang Phõ, the fact of my being here is no longer good kamma. Nehn Soh wants to go with me. Please help by forbidding him from doing so. I did not invite him along, and have no intention whatsoever, either externally or internally, either superficially or deeply, of poaching the novice from you. I do not intend to let Nehn Soh go with me. I know, see and practice in accordance with the scriptures of the Visuddhimagga, in which it states: 'A monk should not persuade a bhikkhu or sāmaṇera who belongs to another monk to go with him and wait on him. This would result in several ongoing dukkata-class offences until he has sent the bhikkhu or sāmaṇera back to his original ācān. Then, in order to settle the matter, he has to confess the dukkata-class offences in question.' Of course I respect this aspect of the Vinaya, if I may say so. No matter which

samnak I am staying in, I keep this aspect of the Vinaya in mind, observe it and practice accordingly. And I am not saying this with a wink.

When I boarded the train, there were indeed many fellow passengers, and yet it can be said that I was alone. The Supreme Teacher has insisted that one should travel alone when on long journeys. It doesn't matter if there is a large group travelling in the vehicle or ship in question, as long as you are not familiar enough with anyone to be able to rely on them in the event of illness or death, then it still counts as travelling alone, on both the way there and the way back. Hence: *vissāsā paramā ñātī* – those you can trust are your best kinsmen.[259] No matter how large the family clan may be, if there is no mutual trust, everyone remains just for themselves, without closeness or connection. Then the warmth of the heart between people becomes empty and fruitless, it is as if one could say: without relatives, without friends, there is no warmth of the heart. But in the highest sense, *paramat*, one should always strive to be self-reliant."

The nehn replied, "The Khrū Bā Ācān did not persuade me. I am leaving anyway. If the Khrū Bā Ācān had persuaded me to go with him, then I would have also seen what in the Khrū Bā Ācān was not in accordance with the Dhamma. Besides, I would have then lost my confidence in him and not wanted to go with him at all. Even my body is already nineteen years old. I am interested in thinking about all kinds of things. Besides, I have already stated explicitly that I want to study and practice with a famous Khrū Bā Ācān. Khuṇ Phõ Ming[260] will probably think that [I am] on the edge and bored. And he might think that I am being unreasonable."

So Luang Phõ Ming gave his consent because [the novice] had spoken with reason in the context of the Dhamma.

On the way to Luang Pū Mahā in Huay Sāi

After I had finished the meal and tidied up the place, I bowed to Luang Phõ Ming and got ready for the journey. The lay people wanted to put me on a bus to Muk, but I didn't want to go there, because in order to travel to my destination I would have had to get on the bus line to Ubon, get off at Mukdāhān and walk from Mukdāhān to Huay Sāi – a greater undertaking. It was better to just take the shortcut via Bān Dong Mõn Kān Lueang. So the lay people put two people in the vehicle to Caeng Tawan (Caeng Tawan is the name of the bus stop) and then turned back. From there I took the direct route. Bān Phohn Daeng was passed, then Bān Dong Mõn Kān Lueang. The Bang Sāi stream was crossed and a rest was taken near Bān Song Pueay. In a rice field in the middle of a thicket, one came across a completely empty field guard's hut, just as dusk was falling, and that was where the night was spent. And there was another field guard's hut about ten rope lengths away. Its owner always spent the night there to guard his property. I went to him and asked for permission to draw some water from his well to wash my face. One had already bathed in the Bang Sāi stream.

He said, "In the field guard's hut where the most venerable is staying, they were attacked and robbed two or three days ago. After that, the people moved back to their old home in Bān Song Pueay. As for us poor people here, we will also return to our old home." During the night there, I meditated; it was quiet and calm. I must have dozed off a little, as it was already light again, the new day had come. One went for alms to that [other] field guard hut. There was a lump of rice per person and the appropriate amount of other dishes. To tell the truth, he brought more rice and other dishes later, but one felt sorry for him and didn't take too much of his food. I had noticed that he was not exactly rich and was living from hand to mouth. I took a lump, a bit bigger than a duck's egg, which was also very meritorious for him, gave him a short blessing, and then we ate. When everything was properly taken care of, goodbyes were said. He pointed the way, and then mindfulness was turned to meditation while walking. Bān Nā Kham was passed, Bān Tāk Daeht, and then on into Bān Nõng Ian Thung and further along the

main road. By the time Huay Sāi had been reached, it was already so dark that the lights had started to be lit.

The Venerable Luang Pū Mahā was in the salā giving a talk to the monks and mae chīs. He greeted me, "Than Lā has come!" Then he announced, "This monk here is one of the foot wiping mats of the Great Phra Ācān Mun." After I had bowed to greet him, we talked about all kinds of things. It was decided that I should sleep in the salā because the kuṭis were all full. I said to the Venerable One, "I caught a fever in Bān Nõng Ian Thung because I had been so hot from the sun and then it rained. There was a strong wind too, so I got soaked through. And then I promptly caught a fever. I continued walking with the fever until the wet robes had dried on my body. At this moment I still have a fever, with respect."

At dawn the next day, I requested nissaya.[261] I was relieved that I was now with the Venerable Luang Pū.

Reunion with noble friends

Flashback to Khuṇ Pheng[262] and Khuṇ Sīhā, who I had previously been with during the Nõng Phue period: while I was staying the night at Wat Pā Suddhāvās, Khuṇ Pheng and Khuṇ Sīhā learned that I had arrived and that I wanted to visit Phra Ācān Mahā Bua. At that time, Khuṇ Pheng was probably with Luang Pū Fan. Khuṇ Sīhā was probably with Phra Ācān Wan. And so they agreed to go and visit Phra Ācān Mahā Bua [as well] in order to spend the rains retreat together as the old group once again. We had already been together in the Nõng Phue period and knew each other well – character, heart and tongue – and this was beneficial for our interactions with each other and for our practice.

That was already in the season after the Vesākha celebration in 1953, in the month of May, with the waning moon. Phra Ācān Mahā said the following to the community behind my back, "When I came to Luang Pū Mun, all the lodgings were occupied. And so he had the community build a kuṭi for me. Well, and now I am building a kuṭi for Than Lā! Now it is time to take turns with Master Luang Pū again. Let's make something out of it!" Then another hut was

quickly built, with a grass roof and a floor made of fāk, and it was done in no time as well. Then Ācān Singhthõng[263] could move in there, and in exchange I was given the other hut to move into. But I lived near Phra Ācān Mahā to the north[264]. The newly built kuṭi was near Phra Ācān Mahā to the south. Sāmaṇera Soh was allowed to live on the side near the fire shed.

In that year, there were eleven monks and four novices. Namely:

1. Phra Ācān as head, 2. Phra Ācān Som, 3. Phra Ācān Singhthõng, 4. Luang Phõ Nin, 5. myself, 6. Khuṇ Phian, 7. Khuṇ Suphat, 8. Khuṇ Pheng, 9. Khuṇ Sīhā, 10. Khuṇ Lī, 11. Khuṇ Sawāt.

The four novices: 1. Nehn Nõi, 2. another Nehn Nõi,[265] 3. Nehn Bunyang, 4. Nehn Soh.

The practice that Luang Pū Mahā guided us in was as it was in Luang Pū Mun's time in Nõng Phue, because in the Huay Sāi period there were not yet many lay visitors. If a monk or novice ordination were to take place, one had to go on foot to Mukdāhān for the ordination. It was necessary to spend the night en route and another night in Muk. After the meal in the morning, the pabbajja and *upasampadā** would take place. Once that was done, one would set off again on foot, with another overnight stay halfway along the route. The next morning, after the alms round and meal, the journey would continue until arriving at Wat Pā Huay Sāi. Such was the mass of suffering of the journey.

Nowadays, no one walks anywhere, as soon as it's five, six, seven or eight kilometres. But when it comes to the old set or the new set of points of practice, along with the corresponding states of mind, that is a matter for each individual according to their own particular nature. One cannot make biased decisions and take sides. And when it comes to the history of the Huay Sāi period, well, it was indeed the phase in which Phra Ācān Mahā hammered on and forged the monks and novices regardless of who they were. But don't forget that in the time of Bān Huay Sāi, in that phase, rural spittoons made of thick bamboo cane were still in use. This was even the case in most of the kuṭis. There were only two canisters of paraffin per year. Only one or two bales of cloth were left for the

entire monastery to make robes each year. As for financial means, sometimes there were only 100 or 200 baht in the entire monastery. The alms food was mostly curries wrapped [in leaves] that had fallen into the alms bowls. Food was eaten from the alms bowl, sweet and savoury together. No one secretly diverted rice porridge with curry sauce into a cup. The one exception was coconut water, but that was only available occasionally. Milk, cocoa and coffee only came in at long intervals. White cigarettes only came in at long intervals.

Why am I saying all this? Do I want to take it with me all the way to Nibbāna? I am telling it so that the last sons of good families can reflect on it, so that they do not let themselves be carried away by the chic times of materialism. I am afraid that the defilements of the heart will also become more and more chic.

In the area of accommodation, the walls were mostly made of banana leaves and straw. Even Phra Ācān Mahā was still living in a kuṭi made of fāk with a grass roof. Doors and windows were just sections of the wall with leaves in them that could be pushed open and closed, or held open with a fork. In the area of practice, there was more time available than there is today.

Luang Pū Mahā was much more resolute in his younger years than he is now. He makes no end of concessions to the crowd of his disciples who are currently on Luang Pū Bān Tād's back. Nobody should ever say that he's strict! And in terms of material things, everything is available in abundance. Just wash your hands and go for it. The only investment goes to receiving visitors, who come and go. But, on the other hand, if no one could visit the Khrū Bā Ācāns from the old guard, you couldn't just tell people to go to the devil.[266]

The water in the streams, ponds and swamps flows down to the sea, to the ocean. And there is clear and cloudy water, dirty and clean water, as well as the multitude of different creatures in the water, the precious stones in the depths of the ocean, copper, brass, tin, lead, gold, for example. It is up to those who possess the necessary knowledge and wisdom to make a choice and to make use of it. One can't blame the sea or the ocean, after all.

Kamma of arson and trap setting

At that time there was an incident in the middle of the [dry] season, in the fourth month. The wind was blowing fiercely. The end of the cold season was approaching. I went on alms round. My kuṭi was a thatched hut, with a grass roof, fāk walls and floor. I had lit a small candle lantern. It was a really tiny lantern. The wind blew in, straight to where the lantern was standing. I had been on alms round with a group of companions and was now returning. I hung up my robes to dry next to the kuṭi and then put on a robe to eat my meal.

It was a strong wind. The lantern had probably fallen over and I had forgotten to put it out. And then the kuṭi burnt down. We all jumped up at the same time. The robe that was still hanging[267] to dry was completely burnt. The mosquito net was completely burnt, as was the klod. My monk's identity document was completely burnt. My razor, a folding knife with a wooden handle, was done. I couldn't make it there in time to get it out. There wasn't enough time, even though I had jumped up quickly. Luang Pū Mahā laughed. Then he said, "We humans really have different kinds of old kamma. Only the clothes on your body are left. Everything else is burnt."

The owner[268] could already guess. But I didn't say anything about it to him. In my mind's eye, I saw myself lighting forest fires and setting up bird traps (tools used to catch a particular species of bird). I was 15 years old at the time, and I used to set fire to the forests between the rice fields and place bird traps on the days when I didn't go to school. They used to have school holidays on Uposatha days because school was held in the Dhamma hall, also known as the "brain distributor". Well, in the language of the village, the Dhamma hall was called the school. Accordingly, this school gave us time off on Uposatha days, not at the weekend. So I went to the forest to light fires. If I wasn't busy scooping out ponds to catch fish in them on a given day, I would go to the forests between the rice fields to light fires and set traps. As soon as the forest was on fire, the Blue Thrushes let out their melodic call, and then they flew in. I set fire in a circle around the bird traps. It was

likely that they would settle on that particular tree and be trapped there. On some holidays I caught four birds, on some holidays five birds, on some holidays I came away empty-handed. Sometimes the fire would also seize the traps, sometimes the hills and rice fields would burn, the entire area.

Arson between the rice fields was possible because they used to be far apart. It would take a day or two before you came across a building in the rice field, and even then it wasn't always a building of good quality. The hills were vast. Nowadays you can't commit arson in this way. And if you do, you can be sure of ending up in the slammer, because nowadays they have nothing but their villages, buildings, fields and rice paddies everywhere. In my mind's eye I had seen this old fire setting kamma, and it had followed me into this life.

Khuṇ Mae Kaeo (Mae Chī Kaeo Sianglam) had witnessed the fire. As events unfolded, she sought ways to replace [the requisites] through a paṁsukūla donation. She invited her siblings and other relatives to come to a paṁsukūla donation.

Luang Pū Mahā also thought that it was my turn – my requisites had been destroyed. Khuṇ Mae Kaeo looked for opportunities to lay down cloth – and so they came and paṁsukūlated for me: cotton cloth for one thing, and in addition a razor.[269] As for the monk's identity document, I got a new one to replace it. It was given to me by Cao Khuṇ Mukdahāramolī. Luang Pū Mahā signed a letter of confirmation for me. And then he cut cloth for the upper and lower robes for me. There were quite a few people in the community who had seen the incident and who felt sorry for me. Luang Pū Mahā laughed, and then he said, "The past kamma of each human being is different. It is up to each individual to deal with it when the time of its arrival comes." What he said was Dhamma as it corresponded to his observations: it was the past kamma of someone who had set forests and towns on fire, manifesting itself in the life of the owner it had followed. It wasn't factually true that I had set fire to anyone's land or rice paddies, but it didn't matter: red ants and other small insects had died in droves.

After the rains retreat in 1955 had ended and the robe season was over, the Venerable Luang Pū wanted to ordain his mother as a white-clad nun. He mulled it over and over: if he brought his mother to Huay Sāi to stay after her ordination, then he would impose an even greater burden on the old nuns, as well as on the young ones, several of whom already lived here and whom he had previously ordained. She was, after all, the mother of the abbot, to whom special respect and attention had to be paid. He feared it would be an inner burden for those nuns who were older and who had been ordained beforehand.

So he decided to look for a new place to stay after his mother's ordination. And he therefore discussed the following with the monastic community:

"So I will go away to ordain my mother. I have already said that it would be completely wrong to come back here. It would also not be right for everyone to come with me. When it was a matter of staying here, everyone pushed to the front. When it comes to leaving, everyone pushes to the front as well. This does the practice tradition no credit and will spoil the family of practitioners.

Therefore, I ask Khuṇ Som Kokanuddo to guide the monastic community to stay here for a while longer over the coming years. If one or the other of you wants to come with me now, I have no objection. As for staying here, I have no objections to that either. If many come with me, it again becomes problematic because we don't know with certainty whether we will find a place to stay." So this was a topic that was worth considering very carefully.

Retreat on Mount Nine

As for me, I weighed it up in my heart, this way and that, and all around: "To set out with a bunch of monks at the same time without already having a place to stay – that's something I've been through before when I went to Phūket and Phang Ngā. And now, once again, I'm stuck between two less than ideal options. Staying here is not ideal, but neither is leaving. And in terms of age, I am over forty. I shall spend another year in the community with Than Ācān Som. And then I will raise the flag; I am determined to go alone to Phū Kao, to Mount Nine." A decision had been made, and so I stayed there, but I told no one [about my plan].

And the Venerable Phra Ācān Mahā prepared to go to Muk for a stay. Members of the community also left one by one, leaving only six monks remaining. Then the Venerable Phra Ācān Mahā went to Udõn for his mother's ordination, and after that he went down to Canthaburī to build a monastery near the Sī Phliu road junction. Ācān Cia's relatives had donated the land. After coming out of the rains retreat, the Venerable One's mother invited him to return. He then built a monastery near Bān Tād, where he is currently staying.[270]

I, on the other hand, stayed with Khrū Bā Som in Wat Pā Bān Huay Sāi for a rains retreat, living there for a total of four years. There were six monks in all. When the Kaṭhina celebration was over and the robe season concluded in the month of November with the waning moon, I took leave of Khrū Bā Som and the lay community and went to Mount Nine. The fare to get there was only one baht, but I didn't let the lay people send me off [in a vehicle]. I just took five boxes of matches, kept the requisites to a minimum, and took only the bare essentials with me.

The timing worked out well, so that I was able to live alone on Mount Nine for five months. After that, the layman Phõ Tān joined me and was ordained as an anāgārika. Shortly before the start of the rains retreat [1957], another layman came to be ordained as an anāgārika. Now that I had anāgārikas with me, I laid down the following rules:

"You must not cook any food! We will live on alms food according to our merits and kamma. Whatever nature has to offer, whether mushrooms or bamboo shoots, need not interest you. After all, I have only just moved on from the Khrū Bā Ācān. The people of the world who live nearby might see this in a bad light: he's only been away from the Khrū Bā Ācān for a few days, and already he's secretly getting something to eat from his anāgārikas. They're cooking bamboo shoots and mushroom soup up to their eyeballs, and all the time he's busy eating. He really is going too far.

I will wash and dry my bowl myself. After the meal, the two old gentlemen anāgārikas should sweep the salā and wash the trays. We will sweep the grounds together – every day, right down to the well.

As for receiving [excess food] from my bowl [on alms round] I want you to take turns, each for one day. I will not hand over my bowl altogether. That means you will weave a basket for yourselves that you can carry by hanging it from a pole [khõn]or by slinging it over your shoulder with a strap [saphāy]. I will divide the rice and other ingredients in the bowl into two parts, keeping one part in the bowl. Then I will carry the bowl myself. This way we share the load and it won't be too heavy for anyone.

During the meal, we will keep an eye on each other. Who has something? Who is missing something? All depending on what accrued on that day in terms of pure alms food that dropped into the bowl.

The hair must be completely shaved off, and both of you are to wear white *sabongs**. We leave the money donations that come in, five or six baht each time, with the people in the village, that is, with Father Bī and Father Laem. I don't want you to carry even one satāng with you. And I want you to devote yourselves to meditation."

I had by no means given up scooping water, and I was still fully involved in carrying it. The tigers were prowling around nearby and roared with relish when you came close to them while sweeping. They were not afraid of the sound of the sweeping. There were hundreds of monkeys in hordes, showing no fear at all. We only heard

about big snakes. It was said that they lived in deep rock holes in the area, holes that led into the mountain. But smaller snakes, no longer than an arm or even smaller, were everywhere during the rainy season. They often came out of the cliff and fell noisily to the ground. People said there were ghosts and demons, but they didn't show themselves. Not like in Phraves Cave near Nā Kae.

During my time on Mount Nine, I caught a fever and was ill for five or six days. That was while I was still alone and didn't yet have any anāgārikas with me. I couldn't go on alms round for three or four days and I was vomiting. Mr. Cū came by and brought food, but I didn't let him stay overnight to take care of me.

The lay followers, Father Laem and Mother Laem, always observed the five ethical precepts. Father Bī and Mother Bī observed the five ethical precepts from time to time. Everyone in Bān Khohk Klāng was very approachable, as they were in Bān Lao, Bān Lub Pueng and Bān Waeng Sai, the village of Mother Tān, Father Tān, Grandmother Khiao and Mother Mui. Grandmother Khiao was the head of this family. Father Thõng Khian, *Mae Õk** Sõy, *Phõ Õk** Cān Phan and others made up the group from Bān Lao. Phõ Õk Khuṇ In, and Mae Õk Phaeng were in the group from Bān Lub Pueng. The lay followers from Bān Khohk Klāng were Mother Sai, Teacher Un, Village Headman Thõng, Mr. Krasin, Mr. Śī, Dh. E. first class, and Mother Sui.[271] They all gave alms food and whatever else they could. And then, of course, there was Phõ Õk Phaeng, Mae Õk and Miss Phaeng! They were yet another important family in Khohk Klāng. Please forgive me for not writing down all the names.

In summary, it can be said that whether I disclose the names or not makes no difference. When good deeds are done, it is not difficult to herd the fruit of the good deeds into the stable, as is the case with cattle and buffalo. The fruit of good and bad goes in naturally by its very nature. Entry into the stable of the heart is not difficult.

While staying on this mountain to practice the Dhamma, there were some problems with the water. Perhaps because in previous lives I had not created any pāramis in relation to water. That may well be. And it was probably a fruit of kamma in this very existence. When I was still a householder, I had diverted and scooped

out water from various streams, ponds, ditches and pools to catch fish and to pay homage to King Tongue, King Stomach, and King Guts. That could well be the case. Or because I dug wells and built sālās without putting my heart into the work projects, since I thought they were unimportant activities. So the blessings I received from them had to be accompanied by inconveniences in the realm of water supply and by the loss of lodgings. But I had also brought this kammic mess on myself, so I am someone who has little gain in many respects.

It is true that gain cannot be taken along into Nibbāna, but according to the Vinaya, the four requisites are the gain in the sense of the instructions that follow [the ordination], which are there to support the one who has gone forth so that he can lead the holy life and progress without problems.

It is true that we are even advised not to cling to the four requisites, but we have to rely on what is available and in line with the Dhamma. If there is little, then we rely on little. If there is much, then we rely on much, and in doing so, we must not be negligent, [as for example] when we see someone where much gain has come to him in line with Dhamma, and then become envious, or when we see someone where little gain has come to him, but in line with Dhamma, and then we look down on him because he has less gain than we do. If someone gets something, something comes to him, and then he gets conceited about it and becomes wasteful, then you don't even want to talk to him and inquire.[272] These are all cases in which one does not recognise the nature of gain, because one succumbs to gain, falls for fame and has no idea of Dhamma. And one is far from Nibbāna. That is probably the view in most cases.

I had plenty of time to practise while I was staying on this mountain. After the meal was finished and the requisites were properly put away, I practised walking meditation until midday. The meditation continued without interruption. Every movement of the body even while sweeping the monastery grounds was meditative, right down to the lifting of the hand that swept back and forth. The stepping motion of the legs when coming and going was meditation, as was the walking down to fetch water.

The rock spring was about fifteen rope lengths away from where I was spending the night. I took a bucket or a canister together with a carrying pole and put them down after a distance of about fifteen arm spans. Then I returned and swept down to the spot where I had put the water canister and carrying pole. Then I put the broom down there. Then I carried the canister and carrying pole forward bit by bit until I had reached the rock spring. After bathing, I scooped water, then shouldered the water with the carrying pole and carried the sweeper, that is, the broom, together with the carrying pole on one shoulder to the top. Little by little, I climbed up the swept path. Then, every day at three o'clock in the afternoon, I went to my lodgings. I also swept the area around the lodgings every day.

Nowadays, people think: "We have better [kammic] potential than the old guard. Wherever water is needed, it comes out of the tap. Sleeping in the middle of the forest is pure pleasure. After getting up, there are Khām Põm and Samõ snacks everywhere. There is also no shortage of drinks of every kind. It is quite modern with a TV, fan, Landrover, Mercedes, Toyota and Datsun. The climate here is great." Most people only care about the climate, as if they even wanted to pay attention to the climate around their anus and urethra.

But I am only writing this as a warning to myself. The reader and listener should not be angry, okay? If one could take anger all the way to Nibbāna, then one should carry it around with oneself to one's heart's content because one can't buy or ask for anger from anyone. It would be a very fresh, very hot commodity.

If I should have many defilements, then readers and listeners are welcome to laugh their heads off. If [what is written] is right, then hand it over completely to the path and the end of suffering. If it is wrong, then hand it over to the origin of suffering and suffering. That's not the job of the author. And when those who read, hear, and contemplate this enter into a war of views and knowledge, they have a problem that will lead them to rack their brains. It is a problem that will lead to a loss of mindfulness, a loss of wisdom, and to the corruption of the heart and Dhamma in that very person.

The sect of the false teachers

At the beginning of my time on Mount Nine, I was alone for five months. Then a 30-year-old Annamese[273] man came to visit me. He was of medium height. He had come to take mountain photographs and so he climbed up to visit me. When he got to the top, he challenged me, "Ñākhrū, Ñākhrū,[274] will you tell me something I can take with me?" So I said, "Well, whether you take it with you or not, I want you to tell me something first. Don't put so much pressure on me, don't push me so hard. Let me listen first."

So he said, "Then listen carefully to what I have to say. There is no religion. [The rank of] father and mother does not exist either.[275] The virtues of father and mother also do not exist. The work and deeds we do should benefit the state. There should be no private property. It should only be for our subsistence. We should all work purely for the wellbeing of the state, which in turn makes all humans equal. Does Ñākhrū agree?"

I said, "Whether I agree or not, I would first like you to continue telling me. I will listen. Don't put so much pressure on me, don't push me so hard." So he continued, "There should be no powerful, no lowly, and no superior. All should be equal. All should receive the same salary and the same amount of happiness. When children are born, the state should take care of their upbringing. No need to trouble yourself with it. If a person should receive any goods, they should hand everything over to the state. There should be no owners and no property. Only the necessities of life and daily needs should be covered. All should be equal. There should be no class differences or castes. Everyone should be a boss in the same way. If there are to be subordinates,[276] then everyone should be a subordinate in the same way. If there is a corresponding form of address, then it should apply equally to everyone. If "boss" is to be used as a form of address, then everyone should be addressed in the same way. No one should be special. Everyone should be equal. There is no religion. Does Ñākhrū agree with this? The virtues of father and mother do not exist. If they raise children, that is their business. They gave birth to them, so they must raise them. Evil does not

exist. Good does not exist. Good is simply having food to eat and a [place to] sleep. Do you accept this?"

I said, "Well, are you finished? If you are finished, I will answer. If not, continue speaking." He said, "I would like to leave it at that for now and ask Ñākhrū to respond." I said, "Let me ask you a few questions. How can all humans be equal? Can you make a person with crippled legs into a person with healthy legs? Can you make a stupid person into a smart person? Can you make a weak person into a strong person?" In his answer, he gave credit to the truth, "I can't do that."

I continued, "A father is a father all the way. A mother is a mother all the way. Are they just buddies and friends? How do you deny their virtues, their worth? Their duty to take care of us is also our duty to take care of them in return. They raised us, and then we feed them in return. We take on their duties and responsibilities and thus ensure the continuity of the family line. We behave in a way that makes us worthy to inherit. When they pass away, we perform good deeds and dedicate the merits to them. This is how we must behave. When someone greets us and asks, 'How are you?' we greet them back and say, 'Fine!' That's the way it is with mutual care.

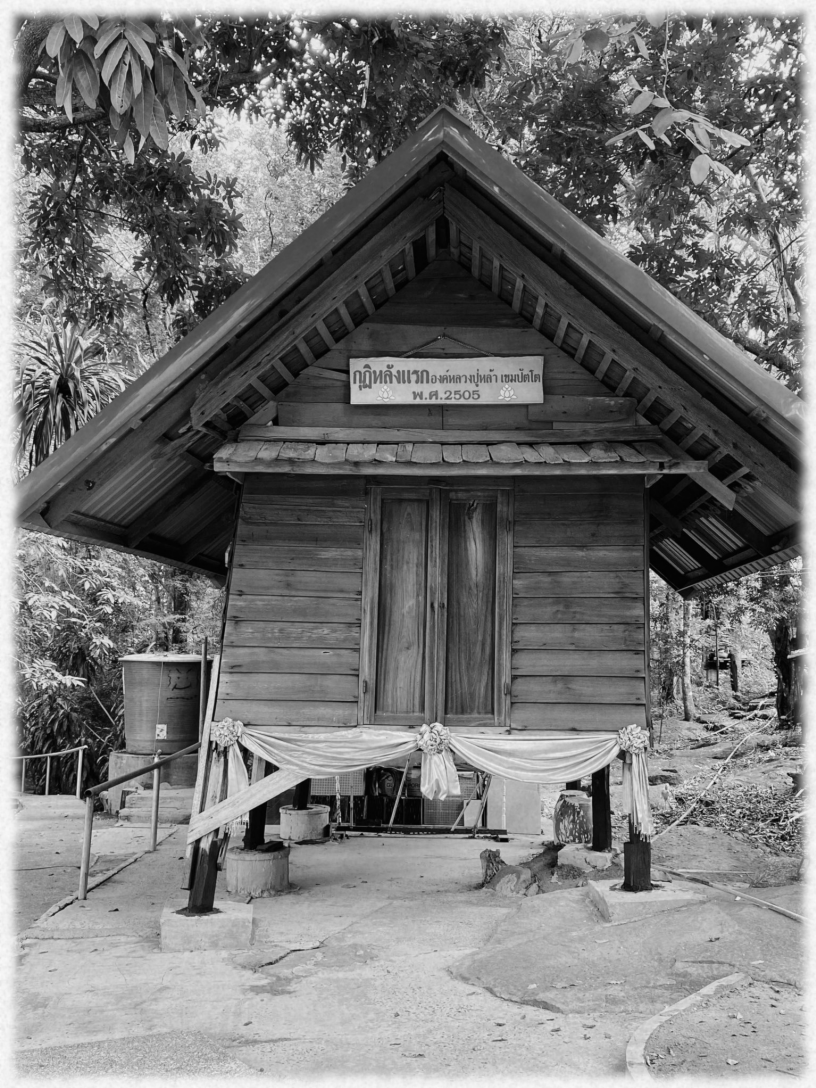
Well, [as you] do it, one simply cannot talk. Such talk does not impress me at all. How should it work, making all humans the same? They are not the same! Hey, I'll tell you something. Suppose you know how to do carpentry or forging, and I can only hammer stones; then you'll send me to hammer stones. A carpenter needs a nice shady place. When it comes to eating, living, and sleeping, our circumstances differ. Or as far as rank is concerned, you'll probably order me around. I'm the stone-breaker. Whoever is in charge gets to sit in the shade. I have to break stones in the blazing sun in the middle of the day. How could we ever be equal? A father has to be a father all the way. A mother has to be a mother all the way. The earth's surface still has hills and valleys. How could one possibly make it even?

Which is more valuable, a sum of five baht or ten baht? Which is more valuable, a hundred baht or a one baht coin?" He answered accordingly, "The hundred baht is more valuable."

So I continued, "[With money] there are inherent class differences. Who made this? Well, its value is inherent in itself. Soil with manure and soil without manure also have a different value. Peacock wood or bamboo, which is better? They are the same weight, but peacock wood is more expensive, so they have a different value. Value increases with quality.

And so a father is a father all the way. A mother is a mother all the way. To kick their asses and call them [equal] buddies is just not on. If you're stupid and then teach others, then the others also become stupid. You're totally crazy, and yet you come here to teach me so that I'll go crazy too. But I'm not going to play along with that, okay? If you don't think there are class differences, then why don't you let Stalin have a go at breaking some stones? Why is he guarded by so many soldiers, hundreds and thousands of them?"

He started, "My goodness! It's really annoying that this Ñākhrū speaks in such underhanded (devious) ways." So I said, "There is nothing wrong with my words. I want you to think about it. Don't be angry. Because there was room to overtake, I just overtook. Lying is only for fools." So he said, "If this Ñākhrū keeps on talking in such underhanded (devious) ways, I'll just withdraw from his influence. And since that's the case, I'm leaving right now!" I then said, "Fine, if you want to leave, then get lost!" So he left, having clearly shown that he could only impress stupid people on his propaganda trip. How could he have impressed people who had reached ethics and Dhamma?



In the first year of my stay, the lay people built a small kuṭi, a straw hut with a thatched roof and walls made of straw, which served as accommodation for three rains retreats. During the fourth rains retreat, they built a kuṭi with boards made of pueay wood, two metres ninety centimetres wide and more than four metres long.

Wat Phū Cõ Kõ (from 1957)

The Buddha's teaching is something profound, not something whose meaning can be easily grasped by a person with thick ears and a wild gaze. That is why one usually encounters only blind people in the world trying to show off their skills by threading a needle in front of someone with good eyesight.

Luang Pū Lā at Wat Phū Cõ Kõ, November 1995

Wat Phū Cõ Kõ

The beginnings of Phū Cõ Kõ

After coming out of the rains retreat on Mount Nine, I went to Mukdāhān to ordain lay follower Phõ Tān, who had been an anāgārika. Truth be told, he had no intention of becoming a monk, but he felt that if he was going to wear a robe, he might as well do it properly.[277] And he had never been ordained as a monk before, so I trained him in preparation for ordination. How long he would remain [in robes] was dependent on the circumstances. (As for that [other] Anāgārika Theh, he disrobed from the status of anāgārika and went home.) After Phõ Tān was ordained and had received upasampadā, we stayed at Mount Nine for a few more days, then lay follower Mae Tān and her family group invited us all to stay at Mount Phū Cõ Kõ for three days or for seven days, or however long.

The first time, we spent about four or five nights in a cave. Then the lay followers from Bān Waeng discussed the situation, "If we let him live in the cave, it will be quite cramped. When lay people come, it will be overcrowded." Then, little by little, they brought in materials for a hut behind the cave, with a floor made of fāk, and a roof and walls made of straw, measuring about two metres across. The frame was made of round pieces of wood all around, about the thickness of a shinbone. There was no verandah. A ladder was leaned against the hut, which led directly into the sleeping chamber.

It was a wild, overgrown forest. There were rows of pueay trees, very large, very tall, very old. It was dim. Those pueay trees were hollowed out all the way to the end. During the rains, there were bound to be snakes climbing up into the kuṭi every day. They hunted lizards that had hidden in the straw walls and in the fāk of the floor, making a lot of noise and not holding back. Sometimes

they curled up under the bowl stand, but those were mainly vipers. There were all kinds of snakes, even ones I didn't know the names of, because, after all, it was a mountain jungle. The boulders and cliffs were teeming with holes and burrows. There were yellow and black panthers, civet cats, marten cats and monitor lizards. King tigers were there in the early years, but then they disappeared.

There was a severe shortage of drinking water and water for general use. It was carried up in canisters from about 20 rope lengths away. In the second year, the water came a little closer, about 15 rope lengths, but it was still not enough to meet our needs, so we continued to fetch water from the Khõ stream, which was 20 rope lengths away. During the rainy season, in the ninth and tenth months,[278] it was quite tolerable because we could scoop water that flowed out from under the rocky cliffs. The children and grandchildren helped with this, but Mrs. Wārin, Mrs. Samay, Mrs. Say and several of their children and grandchildren showed particular dedication. However, the monks and novices could not leave all the work to them. As a rule, they also had to draw water every day to share the burden. On alms round, I took a canister on a carrying pole and carried it filled with water [on the way back]. For this, I made a carrying pole with a thicker front end. I handed my alms bowl over to Sāmaṇera Inthawāy and then carried the water. In this way the occasion of this walk was not left unused.

We also didn't neglect to sweep the path to the Khõ stream once every three days for the alms round because there were many vipers.[279] If we hadn't, we would have inevitably stepped on them on alms round. On the day we swept the path, we also had to take canisters with us, placing them at intervals along the way. The ground was swept up to the canister and carrying pole, then the broom was put down and the canister and carrying pole were moved a little further. Then the broom was picked up again and the ground was swept up to the canister and carrying pole. This was repeated in stages until the water source was reached. After bathing, water was drawn and carried up the hill. The broom lay on top of the carrying pole.

The wells that were dug: one was on the bank of the Khõ stream, and Mother Say had lined it with bamboo. The second was on the bank of the Khõ stream on the side where Father Plī's fruit plantation was located. It had been dug by Mother Dhanūśīn and Mother Khadsā. The third was Inspector Samniang's well, which was even further away than the Khõ stream wells. The fourth well was near Father Sanguan's rice field, but it didn't provide a year-round water supply. Fifth, a dam near the bridge over the Chan stream, which belonged to Mrs. Sanguan's father. He let us bathe there and wash the bowls, but as soon as January came around, [the stream] was completely dry. Sixth, a well had been dug below the dam that belonged to Mrs. Sanguan's father, but it didn't provide water all year round either. The seventh well was dug in the Noeht field, but here also there was no year round water supply. The eighth well was dug near the eating sālā and drilled through the rock. It was sufficient for washing the alms bowls, but from February on it was also dry and provided just one canister full per day, and then only murky mud. So, during the third, fourth and fifth[280] months of the year, we had no option but to continue fetching water from the Khõ stream.

This raises the question: Isn't it crazy to stay on life and death in a place where there is a genuine shortage of water? Is this where Nibbāna can be found? Aren't there plenty of other places to practise? Īsān is known to be a huge area. Will [the author] tell us what benefits he gained from it, what it brought him?

Sure, that is true, but of course no one can bend the fruits of their kamma once it has been created. If it were possible to bend them, there would be no need for prisons, no wandering around in saṁsāra, and no piling up of pāramis. Then Nibbāna would be the only agent. Those who wish to attain *sugato*, must first go through *dukkhato*[281] fully, otherwise a notable disenchantment with regard to saṁsāra can not be attained. So there must be *dukkhāpaṭipadā danthābhiññā*, practice under difficult circumstances with slow realisation, and *dukkhāpaṭipadā khippābhiññā*, practice under difficult circumstances but with quick realisation. Regarding *sukhāpaṭipadā khippābhiññā*, practice under favourable circumstances with quick realisation, and *sukhāpaṭipadā danthābhiññā*, practice under favour-

able circumstances with slow realisation, the following applies: they arise from the different types of kamma and its results. Beings must follow their kamma and its results after all.

Later on Khuṇ Sīlā Indavaṁso obtained two tanks suitable for storing drinking water. Even so, we still had to go to the Khõ stream to draw water. Later, the Somsakśī Nikomkhamsrõy company built three concrete water tanks, two metres wide and three metres high, which made things a lot easier. With two more kuṭis and a fire shed we were considerably better off, but during the season of the fifth month we still had to go to the Khõ stream occasionally to draw water. Then came the rectangular brick tanks, which were more than a metre high and long. But nowadays, people from near and far have provided their kind support in every way possible to make everything much more bearable.

But it was the backwardness of Īsān that still led to shortages and challenges in every area, like in the area of foot pedal sewing machines. Khuṇ Sīlā got hold of one that we've been allowed to use for more than ten years now. A bridge over the Khõ stream: Khuṇ Sīlā persuaded his relatives to build one. Before that, for eight years, we had been climbing over the trunk of a rubber tree. Phra Ācān Cām[282] kindly provided all kinds of assistance. The lay people from Bān Waeng, Bān Lub Pueng, Bān Khohk, as well as from Nõng Sūng to the south of Bān Lao and [another] Nõng Sūng near Huay Sāi – they all helped as best they could, each according to their own abilities and to the extent of their faith. It is beyond my power to list them all by name.

The initiative [to build] the salā for the mae õks for their practice on the Uposatha days, and the inspiration to start this project, came from teacher Chālī Phakphon and Mr. Thanõm Vongsaneh. The current salā and the four large water tanks were community projects where visiting monks, novices and several lay people from other monasteries and other provinces helped without complaint and without flimsy excuses. I myself had nothing to gain from it personally, except to be able to write about it. Everything benefited the samnak.

It was accomplished through the power of Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, through the power of the Khrū Bā Ācāns and the companions in the holy life, through the bhikkhus, sāmaṇeras from near and far, together with the Buddhists from near and far who are devoted to Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. When it came to the concrete water tanks, whether the earlier set or the later ones, the Somsakśī Nikomkhamsrõy company took on all the responsibility. A transport company together with lay people from Bān Waeng and Bān Pao helped with the hauling and carrying. From Bān Lao, Village Headman Kõng and his villagers came to help by transporting more than 1,000 canisters of sand uphill in wheelbarrows. Even the teachers and pupils of all the schools in Nõng Sūng South municipality joined in and carried the sand from the foot of the mountain to the top with much fanfare.

I thank them all for everything they have done, on every occasion. Whoever has done something out of faith, whether much or little, may they by the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, reap the fruits they deserve, whether much or little, now and forever, in accordance with the causes. I am, of course, glad and happy for each and every one of them. The Phū Cõ Kõ period is the phase of my old age, of growing old, after having travelled here through saṁsāra. It was also a phase of lack in every respect. The traffic conditions were not favourable either. Uphill and downhill along the rushing stream. Materialism doubled the prices. The Buddhists, whether from Thailand or abroad, whether they came with a grain of rice, a piece of vegetable or much more, whether I was aware of it or not, whether they came with things worth only one satāng or more than that – they all came together to create wholesome fruits and merit with me, with the power of body, speech or even mind in a single mind-moment. By the power of Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, may they all truly prosper, reaching the final end of suffering, in all that comes, in all three worlds and at all times.

Whether we have met or not, I definitely send out the immeasurables to all three worlds at all times. And whether I remember it or not, I am definitely and absolutely *adiṭṭhānapāramīsampanno* and *saccapāramīsampanno*:[283] Nibbānaṁ in this life!

I have never scrounged

Now I will turn to the story of how things continued in Phū Cõ Kõ after I had lived there for three years. During the fourth rains retreat, the straw hut was torn down. Among the lay people from Bān Waeng, Father Śīn initiated the construction of a kuṭi three metres wide and more than four metres long as a community project. After that, one kuṭi was built every year or every two years. It even happened, that four kuṭis were built in one year; that was Khuṇ Nopdon's circle from Bangkok. But I don't really want to talk about building, building, building, because everyone is talking about that topic everywhere. At first, I thought I was determined not to build anything at all. But after living there for a long time, several years in a row, it became clear that there was no accommodation for the community of monks and novices who wanted to live there, so it was necessary to build something.

But I didn't trumpet it around, didn't beg or scrounge, didn't overstep the bounds of what is Dhamma. Whatever came in the correct way, in accordance with Dhamma, was done. I didn't organise charity events in the monastery to collect money or to woo people.

The construction work was only carried out to the extent that it was sufficient for us to stay there. And for our water supply, we were dependent on rainwater, which was collected on the roofs and then fed into tanks, because one of the characteristics of this mountain was that it had no water, and that is how it remained.

And since I do not consider [the monastery] my property, the defilements will probably not gain too much strength. I humbly regard it as the property of the Buddha's teaching, and thus the defilements are weakened and cannot become impetuous. What I humbly consider my temporary possessions are merely the eight monk's requisites. And even of these I have diverted things, exchanged them, and given them to this or that monk. There is nothing more to say about this. Even the skin that encases me, borrowed from the elements earth, water, fire, and wind, I will return to earth, water, fire, and wind, that is, when it disintegrates back into the original elements. The earth component disintegrates into earth, water

disintegrates into water, fire disintegrates into fire, wind disintegrates into wind. They descend to the *mahābhūtas*, the main states of being, to the *dhātus**, the elements.

The defilements, that is, the delusion, the state when the knowing is not equal to the problems, in one who is led astray by earth, water, fire, and wind – they *become* earth, water, fire, and wind. These defilements assemble earth, water, fire, and wind into a ghost, into a skeleton that guards earth, water, fire, and wind. It will cry out like a mountain bird: "Mine, mine, mine!" And yet it is again dependent on kamma and its fruit.

The Buddha's teaching is something profound, not something whose meaning can be easily grasped by a person with thick ears and a wild gaze. That is why one usually encounters only blind people in the world trying to show off their skills by threading a needle in front of someone with good eyesight. There are only a few who row or paddle the boat across – the horns of the cow! The hair of the cow refers to those who dangle their legs in the water, causing the boat to circle around or run aground.

The heart is heavily occupied on the path of the defilements. The grey matter of the brain is also on the path of the defilements. We submit ourselves to the guidance of the heart while lying on our stomachs and on our backs.[284] We submit ourselves to the guidance of the grey matter of our brains while lying on our stomachs and on our backs. Whether the heart has defilements or not, no board member who selects and decides is required. Whether the grey matter of your brain has defilements or not, there is no board member who selects and decides. It is the same with mindfulness and wisdom. There is simply no board member who selects and decides.

Even a tiger possesses mindfulness and wisdom. But its mindfulness and wisdom are directed towards pouncing on someone to stuff them into its stomach. If the heart and Dhamma of a person have not yet reached one of the stages of the noble ones, that person is naturally someone who devours everything indiscriminately. True Dhamma is a treasure for the wise, but for the foolish it is a spear, a fishhook, fuel and fire. This means that the gang of fools understands its meaning in this way, but in reality it cannot be used

as fuel or fire, as a spear or fishhook against anyone. It is and remains true according to the nature of good and evil, path, fruit and Nibbāna.

Wat Phū Cõ Kõ today

During this Phū Cõ Kõ phase, from its beginnings to the present, as I write this, everyone – whether those who had gone forth or those who were householders, whether from near or far – helped and did their best. Among the monks and novices, Khuṇ Inthawāy and Khuṇ Sīlā were there at the very beginning; among the lay people, Khuṇ In's father and his wider family and clan; the entire clan of Grandmother Khiao, the family of Mother Õ, Mayor Chīvavan, Mayor Buaphan and all the others – I cannot write them all down. Miss Sawāng Paḍhanākõn, the family of Village Headman Tān, Inspector Samniang – they were all so valuable to me in one way or another. I also ask for forgiveness for not writing their names in full here.

By nature, I have in no way ever cultivated the character of an ungrateful person. Of course, I often take the Venerable Mahā-Sāriputta as a precedent. When the Venerable Rādha was still a householder, he gave the Venerable Sāriputta just a single ladleful in his alms bowl, and Sāriputta took note of this and remembered it later. This is recorded in the history of the monastic elders. If anyone were to accuse me of trying to curry favour [with my supporters] by writing this, I have an example here that I can refer to. For the most part, people are not grateful to one another. When they are angry with someone, they like to make that occasion the master of their heart and worship the fire of hatred. In this way, they pick a flower to pay homage to their own anger. At the same time, they bind the anger firmly to themselves: *upanāha*, perpetual resentment. Then there is no way to mitigate or settle enmities.

Each and every one of us must have done something good, in one way or another, if not in this life, then probably in previous lives. Oh well, and there are loads of future lives! If one believes in the next life, the next existence, and in a previous life, a previous

existence, and therefore brings forth good qualities in one's dealings with others, or reflects on good qualities in one's dealings with others, or wants to let go of mutual hostility, or believes in kamma and its fruits, or in the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, or supports each other, or believes in kamma and its fruits in the present life, if one believes that there is good and evil, that the path, fruit and Nibbāna exist in the heart of the present, in the Dhamma of the present, then one has gained a great inner treasure, a gold mine, more valuable than heaven and earth. It is the treasure of faith and wisdom, which are in balance with each other. It is a treasure that doesn't disappear anywhere. It cannot be hoisted, carried, shouldered or dragged.[285] It cannot be transported by car or cart. No one can rob, steal, extort or demand it as ransom. It doesn't sink in water, and it cannot be lost. It is the shadow of the mind, the shadow of the heart. It follows the essence of the heart, the essence of Dhamma, and it is very light. This point is, of course, the true Dhamma, the true heart, the true wisdom and the true faith of a noble one.

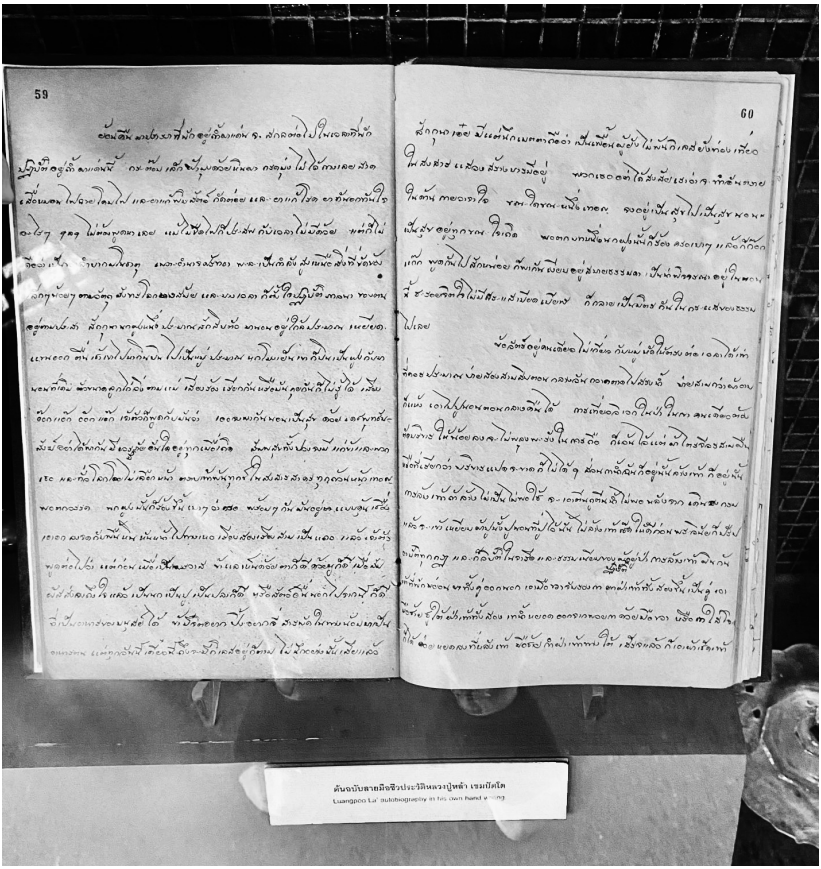
A wise person naturally has trust in things that are worthy of trust, such as that good deeds lead to good results and bad deeds lead to bad results. For example. But if, under the influence of one's own defilements, whether many or few, one presents bad causes as good causes, then naturally those bad causes cannot become good causes. If truly good causes are mistakenly presented as bad causes, those causes can nevertheless not be bad causes. For in those causes lie the effects; they are the courthouse of the Dhamma, which at the end of the path decides, impartial with regard to any world and any teaching. Those who know how to choose between good and bad causes with certitude and without hesitation must already have brought a wise understanding with them and at the same time have experience with the final accounting on both sides. They are teachers who can instruct themselves and bring themselves to come to their senses. They know clearly the way up and down: "This is a cause of well-being. That is a cause of suffering. Well-being is the result of this cause. Suffering is the result of that cause." Otherwise, they cannot decide between cause and effect, and this right up to the hour of death. For as long as they lack understanding, they will be boiled through because of that. Kamma and its results, causes

and their effects, plants and their fruits, intentions and their consequences, knuckling down to something and its outcome – all these have one and the same meaning, but they produce different results, either good or bad, it depends.

The apāyamukha, vices of all kinds, are causes, plants, kamma, knuckling down, and intentions. They are definitely the path to ruin. There is no human, deva, māra, brahma, or Buddha who, in this case, could turn things around for the better, unless they detach themselves from these things, giving them a wide berth. This Dhamma is an important message for householders. Monks and novices should have nothing more to do with [vices], otherwise they would become like the wolf playing the flute in the Aesop's fable. And they would have no idea what it means to be a monk or novice, no idea about the Buddha's teaching. If the customs are to be regarded as genuine Dhamma, monks and novices must practise Dhammavinaya at increasingly higher levels and be a central hub for the people of the world. If they are still engaged in gambling, another vice, and at the same time wearing the yellow cloth after losing the white one, then it would really be better if they dressed in rags, took a spade in their hands and dug for crabs in the rice fields like a child. But there are also children who do not kill living beings, even though they do not wear yellow cloth. If a family has no vices, that family will progress quickly, both in terms of external goods and high inner values. The world today is quite a mess in this respect.

I write down whatever comes to mind. There is no system, no order. In the first year of my stay, the lay people built a small kuṭi, a straw hut with a thatched roof and walls made of straw, which served as accommodation for three rains retreats. During the fourth rains retreat, they built a kuṭi with boards made of pueay wood[286], two metres ninety centimetres wide and more than four metres long. It was covered with planks, but partitioned with walls made of woven bamboo, which the people of Īsān call hia-wood walls. Once the walls were woven, they were reinforced at the edges, then hung up and tied in place. After another three years, the bamboo was removed and replaced with tamarind wood boards. As time went on, it sprouted here and there in the manner of poor people. It was

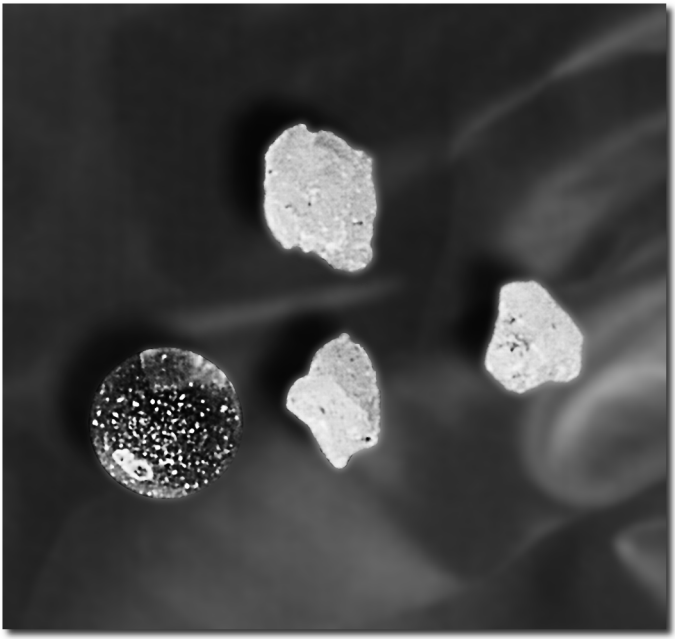
good enough to live in, to stay in, and there was nothing about it that would have been considered ostentatious in that part of the country. To use a comparison from the lives of householders – it was a case of hand to mouth. This stumbling forward was a Dhamma discourse on the nature of suffering. It didn't allow any getting lost. The place, the gain and the reputation were good enough for a mind of coarse nature. It needed a challenge in the form of intimidation: "Go on, go on, go on! Can you see that mass of suffering?" Disenchanted or not, intimidated or not – a constant companion with the face of a villain.



Writing down my own life story as it has unfolded in saṁsāra, in this present life alone, as far as I have a clue, shouldn't be too far beyond my abilities, even if expanded to include the urgency embedded in the Dhamma, the lessons that life has taught in each existence.

Luang Pū Lā's
treasures

Nibbāna does not come along and tell its autobiography, which other people then honour as sacred texts.



Relics of Luang Pū Lā Khemapatto

Luang Pū Lā's treasures

Genuine resistance

The situation of lack, with all its challenges,[287] was a great teacher, urging to be mindful and leaving no room for doubt when it came to birth and existence. Speaking of birth and existence – even if one wanted to completely fill heaven and earth with external material things, even if these were solely gold mines and treasure chambers, no matter how many millions of them there were – the end result would ultimately always be suffering.

Only the noble ones are exempt from this, because their hearts and Dhamma have already risen above these things, because the fetter has already been torn and ripped out. Materialism is not a rope with which to bind them, because they have been able to train their hearts to rise above materialism. For these venerable ones do not cling to the convention of "gain," and they do not cling to the convention of "loss". When they gain something, they leave it as gain. When they lose something, they leave it as loss. They are not tangled up in either knot. They are ready to leave their hearts unwedded. Dhamma, the nourishing ground of the heart, and the heart, the nourishing ground of Dhamma, join together unwedded within them, without being jealous of each other. They give Dhamma back to the Dhamma within them, and they give the heart back to the heart within them. The two do not meet as enemies in battle. Nor can anyone make the heart and Dhamma cause problems for each other, where points have to be scored [in battle] in order to win or lose. At this level, Dhamma is definitely deep Dhamma. It belongs to a person with a heart at a high level. But Dhamma exists before the heart; it is more subtle in nature than the heart. If Dhamma did not already exist before the heart, the heart would have no way of recognising Dhamma, and it would have no way of making a choice.

An arahant who has taken their last breath and entered Nibbāna without remainder has nothing more to do with proclaiming "heart, heart," because it does not deserve this honour. All they can proclaim is the deathless Dhamma, the deathless element, the deathless domain, the deathless faculty. This means that they are wholly in the mode of the Deathless. Regardless of whether in [terms of] Dhamma, element, realm, or faculty, they no longer rely on the heap of name-and-form. Well, and the heap of name-and-form also has nothing to do with secretly relying on anything.[288] This is such a subtle and profound matter, there is no comparison to be found for it.

For one who has not clearly seen the formations that arise, change and pass away without interruption, and who has not contemplated them without interruption, together with the in and out breathing of the Venerable Ānāpānassati, in that person the heart, together with mindfulness and wisdom that come together in balance in a single moment – namely, in the present, that lies before the eyes, before the heart, before wisdom, before Dhamma – is perhaps still too biased, too wavering, too submissive, too content, too sluggish, too hasty with regard to Nibbāna, because the pāramis and faculties are still too weak, because of kamma and its effects, which are the essence of the cycle of existence. Ignorance and delusion are the big bosses, the masters who push and shove whatever is fermenting in the nature of the khandhas – bound, entangled and constricted. The heart is still too wavering, too biased, too submissive, too turbulent, too shaky, too sucking, too tugging.

This is the predominant kamma; kamma that one has grown accustomed to until it has become habitual kamma. It is a magnet that exerts its power of attraction along the path of external and internal materialism. In external materialism, there are forms, sounds, smells, tastes and objects of touch in the external heap of form, in the external dhammas, the external elements. Internal materialism then consists of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. They are called the internal heap of form, internal dhammas, internal elements or internal faculties. Spiritualism,[289] the inner life, is the heart, also called the internal Dhamma or the internal element. It is also called internal nāmadhammā, nāmadhātu, nām'indriya,

nāmakkhandha – and they all have the same meaning. As for external nāmadhammā, they are also referred to as external dhamm' ārammaṇā.

Well, these external and internal dhammas, these external and internal elements, all come together and branch out into the three periods of time – the present period, the past period and the future period. Arising is the beginning, change takes place in between, and cessation is the end. It is their constant duty, in which no space between can be found. If wisdom does not clearly recognise, on the side of the truth of cessation, habitually and continuously, then disenchantment with delusion, sobering up from delusion, breaking out of delusion have no chance to manifest. On top of that, [the possibility of] liberation through clear realisation has no vision whatsoever, not even as much as a blink.

If one hasn't yet reached the heartwood while chopping, then how can one see the heartwood? If, when chopping or sawing, one hasn't yet broken through, how can one assume that one has broken through? If the work is not yet done, how can one assume that it is done? One closes one's ears, closes one's eyes and lies to oneself. What's more, one has not escaped the tormenting poison. For within, that is, in the inner world, nothing is hidden. The inner world, the present world, is also called present formations, is also called present defilements, because defilements exist as present, past and future defilements. If the present mind and the present dhamma do not have the power, combined with courageous, determined mindfulness and wisdom, which rise above Mr. Delusion, then of course they cannot break down the bastion of defilements. And that is why the defilements can repeatedly carry them away as prisoners of war.

That fire of lust, that fire of hatred, that fire of self-deception, and the fire of defilements, and the fire of greed, hatred, and delusion – how do they differ? They must have the same meaning, the same taste. They have simply been given many names, many labels, many conventions. They can only be alleviated and stopped with right ethics, concentration, and wisdom as in the Buddha's teaching. External fire can only be stopped by external water, or by not

allowing it to arise in the first place. External fire brings immense damage or infinite blessings, depending on whether or not it is used correctly. The fire of the defilements of the mind brings only damage, never blessings. External fire can be extinguished by external water. But a large fire cannot be extinguished with a little water. And even if there is a lot of water available, if it is not known how to extinguish the fire, it won't help. That's just the way it normally is: when a fire is already fully ablaze, and there is a lot of fuel available, the fire is not obliged to wait for water to come along to extinguish it. Its task is to continue burning without letting up. Nor is it the task of water to say, "I will wait for my deployment as a fire brigade." In the same way, ethics, concentration and wisdom do not claim, "We are the task force for subjugating the defilements." If there is only a small measure of ethics, concentration and wisdom at play, but all the more defilements, then ethics, concentration and wisdom cannot prevail against the defilements.

The topic of external victories and defeats is not particularly popular in the Buddha's teaching. According to the Buddha's teaching, it is about hostility that is repaid with hostility, danger that is repaid with danger, kamma that is repaid with kamma. They are causes that are repaid with causes. According to the Buddha's teaching, all of this revolves around externalities. *Opanayiko*, that which is internal, is conveyed in the Buddha's teaching as follows: when one suffers defeat, one suffers defeat in the battle against one's own defilements, for example, against delusion. When one wins, one defeats one's own delusion, either temporarily or permanently. According to the Buddha's teaching, this alone is the criterion and the meaning.

But representatives of worldly limitations naturally prefer the following explanation: it's about defeats in the fight against other people, other groups, other associations, other villages, municipalities, districts, provinces, regions and countries, and also about victories in the fight against other people, other groups, other associations, other villages, municipalities, districts, provinces, regions and countries – until it becomes an addictive drug. It is a trait that is difficult to correct. If everyone in the world were to compete with one another and try to outdo each other in their wrestling with

their own defilements, resisting them and biting into them, then the world would be full of kindness and harmony and would know only cool shade, free from enmity and danger. One could sleep soundly and deeply without being startled awake because there would be no hostility around, just like a child with its parents. If one loves one's own life, one must also love the lives of others. If one loves one's own wellbeing, one must also love the wellbeing of others. If one has respect for oneself, one must also have respect for others. These are a few examples. The sea of blood, the sea of tears, the sea of hostility, the sea of dangers, will be pacified. Just by observing the five ethical precepts, one would already be fulfilling the laws of the world and the laws of the Dhamma. Then there would be no need to enact so much legislation. The Buddha's teaching is the iron law of the Dhamma, valid everywhere in the three worlds; in the past, present and future worlds, it is the true law of the Dhamma in every age. It is up-to-date in every age. It is not a Dhamma of wild speculation, not a Dhamma based on chance, not a Dhamma cobbled together, not a Dhamma invented. It is a Dhamma that consists only of flesh, not mixed with fish bones. It shows no preference based on gender, class or caste.

The teaching as a protection for the world

The Buddha's teaching is a Dhamma that already protects the whole world in a very direct way. It has left behind the concerns of local and national politics and is instead concerned with protecting the world. In this, it again surpasses local and national politics. And so the Supreme Teacher asserts that Dhamma is a protector of the world, meaning that there are two aspects of it that can protect the world. *Hiri*, shame in relation to unwholesome behaviour, and *otappa*, the recoiling from unwholesome behaviour. If only these two aspects of the Dhamma became the constant behaviour in every human being, in every heart, as Mahā-Ācāns of self-admonition that have already whispered to every heart, then one would not have to keep in mind, study, memorise or mumble an excessive number of laws and Dhamma lessons. Moreover, they are the pillars, the heart of the ethical precepts, of the Dhamma, of the works

of law. If hiri and otappa are not present, then one may well have memorised the entire Pāli Canon, but the palm leaf manuscripts are then meaningless, and it is a bottomless vessel. No matter how much water one pours into it, it cannot hold it. Even if one has learned all the laws at home and abroad, that too would be a bottomless vessel that cannot hold water. (And the world inevitably always encounters nothing but fish bones, as it always has.)

Then we Buddhists would expect refuge from the atomic bomb, as it were. But [the absence of hiri and otappa] is not a safe refuge. It becomes a nuclear threat. *Appamāṇo Buddho, appamāṇo Dhammo, appamāṇo Saṅgho*[290] – they possess great qualities that are beyond measure. Those who have little wisdom can remember little. Those with much wisdom can remember much. Those with a short rope can only pull from close by. Those with a long rope can pull from afar. Those with little strength can carry little. Those with much strength can carry much. Those with dim eyes have difficulty threading a needle. Those with good eyes have no difficulty threading a needle.

During my stay at Phū Cõ Kõ from 1957 onwards, one season followed another – the dry season, the rainy season, the cold season and the hot season – until the moment I am writing this in 1981. A private teacher who preaches to me and chastises me, sometimes lightly and sparingly, sometimes harshly and extensively, is always present in the form of this body: "Do you see? Do you understand? Are you disenchanted?" He chastises me and at the same time returns to the question: "Do you see the suffering of birth?" The answer: "Yes indeed, I see it."

"Do you see the suffering of ageing?" The answer: "Yes indeed, I see it."

"Do you see the suffering of illness and pain in the universe of the body, the mixture of all the cold, all the heat, all the diseases, hunger, thirst, the urge to urinate and defecate?" The answer: "Yes indeed, I see that too, I understand that too, if I may say."

"Do you see that death is suffering? To be subject to the diseases of old age, to be subject to various diseases that lead to death, to have your throat cut, to be shot, to be run over, to be beaten to

death, to drown, to burn, to die violent deaths of various kinds, to die of consumption, to die in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, to die away from deserved wellbeing – do you see that, do you understand that? Do you understand with vision, do you see with understanding?" The answer: "I understand with vision, I see with understanding, in a balanced way, if I may say."

"And what do you think is the normal state of affairs, huh?" Answer: "The normal state of affairs is suffering, not happiness, if I may say so. There are many different normal states. There is the normal state of suffering, which tends towards the worldly. And there is the normal state of suffering, which does not tend towards the worldly. There is the normal state of happiness, which tends towards the worldly. And there is also the normal state of happiness, which does not tend towards the worldly. And there is the normal state of Nibbāna, if I may say so."

"Why are you trying to be clever and giving cheeky answers that go beyond the question? You want to lecture the examiner, don't you?" Answer: "I'm afraid I'll be chastised again if my answer is not profound, if I may say so."

"Then I will question you further. Remember to keep Dhamma, mindfulness and wisdom present, in balance, at the right time. Now the question is about the suffering of not getting what you want; the suffering of being separated from what you like; the suffering of being united with what you dislike. And how do you react to these types of suffering, huh?" Answer: "These types of suffering are really the business of fully developed defilements of the heart. It is essential that the heart, together with mindfulness and wisdom, rises above these types of suffering with the help of the realisation that it is necessary to refrain from identifying suffering with a self, an I, a someone, a being, a person, or from identifying the I, a someone, a being, a person with suffering. One doesn't allow the heart to become gloomy because, with the power at its disposal in relation to the heap of name-and-form, it has already clearly recognised that this heap is something that no one has control over. Its task is to arise, then change and disintegrate. It doesn't make itself a slave to anyone, whether they have wishes or not.

If one is not ready to overcome and uproot wrong understanding at this stage, one will suffer mentally twofold. There will be no access to the means of eradicating suffering because this aspect involves a kind of suffering that should be overcome with comprehensive wisdom. For these types of suffering arise from materialism, from the expectation of being able to control [things], to get a grip on them oneself. It is like trying to scoop sand with one's hands and not have it run through one's fingers. It is like trying to form different figures of people and animals out of water. This is, of course, impossible. And so it is necessary to go against the stream of one's own wrong view, and then completely let go of such stupid expectations. Then wisdom rises above delusion and does not choke on it again so easily, that is unless mindfulness and wisdom are still weaker than delusion at that time. But when mindfulness and wisdom are already superior to delusion, then they are also superior to all kinds of stupidity. Stupidity can no longer rise up against them. Once delusion has been defeated at this stage, there is no door through which one can fall back into further defeat."

Supramundane mind, supramundane Dhamma

Whoever has confidence in things worthy of believing in; whoever has energy in things worthy of making an effort; whoever has mindfulness in things worthy of recollecting; whoever has concentration in things worthy of firm attention; whoever has wisdom in things worthy of knowing them all around – as a force of the Dhamma, which is balanced within itself – that person is certainly an elephant of tremendous essence and great power. No matter which door the delusion called avijjā might enter through with all its strength, it is subject to the power of the true Dhamma, the true heart, the true confidence, the true energy, the true mindfulness, the true concentration, the true wisdom because these things have already risen to the supramundane. There are no devas, brahmas or humans who can annul the earned retirement and cause the descent into the mundane.

Supramundane mind; supramundane Dhamma – this is not a Dhamma that deceives the world. One is not a nice great-grand-

father, great-grandmother, grandfather, grandmother, father, mother who deceives the world because one has already left the clan of worldlings far behind. One does not think back longingly to deceiving oneself and the world, as is the case with worldly limitation, which is far too eager to seek refuge in material things, and which sweeps people together, drives them together, brings them to the same level, throws them together into factions according to their kammic dispositions. The course of kamma pulls and tugs at them. They place their intentions and hopes in accordance with worldly goals, so far removed from the supramundane that they cannot even catch a glimpse of it. When they view each other superficially, they see only bodies and a few aspects of external behaviour. The only exceptions here are the noble ones of the kind that can see the hearts of others. Apart from that, it's all guesswork, conjecture and speculation, sometimes wrong, sometimes right, whereby the wrong must surely outweigh the right.

One who fully understands the dangers in saṁsāra, those of the past, those of the future, and those of the present; or one who is fully committed to the practice, who is not heedless; or one who is fully committed to the Dhamma of liberation; or one who has confidence in the path, fruit and Nibbāna; or one who does not throw in the towel;[291] or one who picks the Dhamma and heart qualities out of Dhamma and heart qualities that are worthwhile – well, these have one and the same meaning.

And as for one who has fully realized the dangers in saṁsāra; or one who practises Dhamma fully, as is appropriate for this Dhamma; or one who has escaped the defilements of the heart completely and without remainder; or one who has escaped the "knower" in the past, the "knower" in the future, the "knower" in the present; or one who has nothing more to do with the "knower" in the past, nor with the "knower" in the future and the "knower" in the present; or one who is not attached to the signs of the form heap; or one who is not attached to formlessness, that is, to the name heap; or one who is not attached to any of the elements; or one who is not attached to any mental objects; or one who is not attached to any states of mind; or one who is not attached to any kinds of self; or one who is not attached to any kinds of not-self; or

one who is not attached to any kinds of "zero, nothing and even emptier";[292] or one who is not attached to convention and liberation; or one who is not attached to gain and loss; or one who is not attached to attachment;[293] for example, as far as those are concerned, they all have the same taste, the same meaning. They have already left the reach of categories and conventions behind them.

This is not a Dhamma that humans of the world can buy, sell or pay for with money in the marketplace of the world. It is not at all a Dhamma of theatre and games nor of movies or television. The author followed the formations of his heart[294] when writing. The interested reader and listener must also follow the formations of their heart when reading and listening. Any questions will then resolve themselves.

Wrong intention closes the door to liberation

During the time of my temporary stay on this Phū Cõ Kõ, I had a lot of fun listening to Dhamma discourses, both external and internal. The expression "temporary stay" means: that which we conceive as one second, one minute, one hour, one day and one night, one month or two thousand five hundred and twenty-four[295] – an enormously short time which never stops melting away and going by. When one says that the days go by, that is correct. When one says that life goes by, this is also correct in the conventional sense. But in the highest sense, no being, no life, no someone goes by anywhere. This also applies to days and nights; they too do not go by anywhere. *Ekarattindivaṁ*, there is only "*by day and by night*".[296]

The back-and-forth talk is intended to ensure that one does not get stuck in back-and-forth talk, both in the conventional sense and in the highest sense. But in contrast, sticky things are just waiting to stick, such as the resin of the jackfruit tree and the sap of the rubber tree. Things that are not sticky are unlikely to stick, such as water on a lotus leaf, a sharp piece of iron on which a grain of cabbage seed cannot remain, birds that fly through space without leaving a trace,[297] or a knife that cuts through water without damaging it.

The Dhamma on the path of the Buddha's teaching is deeper and higher than all other religions. That is certain, at all times, and in saying this I am not taking sides for myself. I am taking sides for the Dhamma, according to its own truth. I am not taking sides for myself, thinking that I am the lord and master of the Dhamma. I am ready to raise the white flag, ready to grant Dhamma a place above me forever, and I do not consider myself its equal in any way. For the same reason, the Supreme Teacher was ready to respect Dhamma. He held that Dhamma existed before him. If Dhamma had not existed before him, he would not have been able to know it. One can experience and practise other religions; it is merely a question of reason, but not the kind of reason found on the supramundane path. It only follows the wishes of the defilements on the path of materialism. It is a self-importance that takes sides with itself and with the defilements, sometimes profoundly, sometimes in a reckless way. One wants it to be well cooked but encounters a world full of fish bones.

So, the four types of samaṇas do not exist in other religions, only in the Buddha's teaching, namely: the stream-enterer, the once-returner, the non-returner, and the arahant. But sometimes, due to misunderstanding, [other religions] claim this for themselves, sometimes in a stubborn, obstinate, and rigid manner, sometimes out of carelessness. Therefore, in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, the Supreme Teacher, by giving precedence to the Dhamma, emphasised: in other religions outside the Buddha's teaching, the four types of samaṇas do not exist at all – as already stated. For in other religions, they perform their practices with the aim of gaining material benefits, which they hope to obtain. No matter how determined they may be in their practices, if their intentions do not detach from and rise above their focus on external gains, then the path that can lead them out of birth, old age, sickness and death is closed to them. For all these founders of religions, ethics, concentration and wisdom have only a worldly scope, reaching at best only to the Brahma World. Through the power of worldly jhānas, they cannot become the Dhamma of disenchantment, which can dispel intoxication and alleviate lustfulness. They can only shape character.

But even if someone is a follower of the Buddha's teaching, but their intentions, which are the master of the house, are focused on the four necessities, if [this attitude] is the great lord and master of their intentions, then they cannot even attain the initial stage of the holy life in this lifetime, namely [the stage] of stream-entry. No matter whether they spend the whole night and the whole day in walking meditation and mind development, whether they fast until they are hollow and their hair and bristles fall out, they simply cannot ascend to sotāpanna. And why is that? Because the orientation towards external worldly things has already closed the door. But if it has already become a basic tendency through a series of births and lifetimes, then a practitioner should turn to their heart at this point – *opanayiko* – and examine and review their intentions in a clever manner, that is unless they have no need for any stage of the noble ones in this life, nor for reaching the highest goal as quickly as possible. One who has no need for the supramundane, one who drifts along in saṁsāra, and one whose hope for worldly things is the boss of his heart – they are one and the same.

Mindfulness and wisdom are our teachers

By the way, the past and future are, of course, vassals of the present because the present is the factor in which things are moved and applied and their meaning can be experienced. If the present is within worldly limitations, the past and future follow suit and are also within worldly limitations. But there's no such thing as past or future. There are only names and the corresponding accounting records. Because one has already passed and the other has not yet arrived. If it was good, then the good is already over. If it was bad, then the bad is already over. Well, if the future will be good, then it has not yet arrived. If it will be bad, then it has not yet arrived. Only the present mind and present Dhamma can leave things that are on the wrong path and practise things that are on the right path.

If one were to leave it at that, merely chewing over the past and the future, then one would forget *opanayiko*, the turning inward in the present moment. The heart and mind would be miles away from

concentration and wisdom. Those who are currently on the path of inner development and have not yet escaped the delusion of the old ego without remainder, have not yet completely rid themselves of it, will doubt and hesitate in the practice. They fish in murky waters and will soon claim, without any justification, to know: "This or that kind of meditation is good!" But no matter what means of meditation, what method is used, if they no longer have respect and love in dealing with Ācān mindfulness and Ācān wisdom in the present, then it is of course completely impossible [to know]. The only exception to this is one who is liberated because their wisdom is proficient, and is superior to delusion. They don't get caught in any of the three knots – the knot of the past, of the future and also of the present – because they have already detached themselves from grasping at the three knots. When they use them in the sense of worldly expression, they use them in a way that no longer has any poison for them. A bird flies through space from morning to night without leaving any trace. A knife cuts through water from morning to night without leaving any trace.

Past, future, present – if there is someone who pushes themselves forward, interferes, grasps them as their own and holds on to them, then according to the highest Dhamma of the Buddha's teaching, this is naturally a misstep because it is connected with rebirth consciousness. One has the cause and fruit of kamma in equal parts within oneself. There is nothing that comes before or after. Those who do not place importance on mindfulness of breathing, together with the mental factors of thinking, and on the "knower" in that same moment, will find it difficult to attain true seeing and understanding. And they will not be readily prepared to believe this aspect of the Dhamma because it is a particularly subtle Dhamma. They will see and recognise some things – in a cloudy and hazy way – but only the very coarse form heap. The practice fails fatally at the form heap that they are contemplating. They do not truly and clearly penetrate down to the three characteristics with right, genuine mindfulness and wisdom. At best, they will be reborn as a brahma with form. But whatever the case, if one does not have the knowledge of realisation that clearly understands and knows the practice, that clearly and correctly knows the not-self-heart, not-

self-Dhamma and the not-self-"knower" in one and the same moment, by no longer searching around, then it is of course totally impossible to turn away from delusion completely, to disentangle oneself from it, to escape it.

But contemplation that goes beyond a level that is healthy until it sinks down and sees everything as empty, regardless of the cost, that no longer knows the limits of what is true according to the real Dhamma – it naturally plunges into hell as abysmal conceit. Well, there is no Supreme Teacher who could do anything about that. For the word *paccattaṁ* must be able to refer to both the mundane and the supramundane. The same is true of the word *akāliko**. The akāliko and paccattaṁ of an arahant are dhammas in which no defilements lurk. Below that, akāliko and paccattaṁ refer to the particular personal level. Even if someone were to believe that good and evil, path, fruit and Nibbāna do not exist, then their akāliko would at any time refer to the view that good and evil, path and fruit do not exist. Even their paccattaṁ would refer to the fact that they see and know for themselves that good and evil, path, fruit and Nibbāna do not exist at all. This makes it extremely difficult [for them] to refer to the Pāli texts as a point of reference.

They can probably fool stupid people with their fool's gold and make them believe it is real gold. But with people who know real gold, their deception will likely be less successful. Dhamma, the true Buddhist teaching, does not deceive the world. Rather it is the world that deceives the world. The defilements deceive the defilements. The thief deceives the thief. Enmity is repaid with enmity. Danger is repaid with danger. Ethics are repaid with ethics. Concentration is repaid with concentration. Wisdom is repaid with wisdom. Disenchantment is repaid with disenchantment. Liberation is repaid with liberation. Purification is repaid with purification. Nibbāna is repaid with Nibbāna. (There is absolutely no need to doubt this repayment.) Closing the eyes is repaid with darkness. Now I will express this in a jumbled manner at a high and low level: whether a large or small pot of soup, a wise person swallows neither fish bones nor other bones. They make a choice.

Bending Dhamma to honour the defilements

When the years of life fly by and only old age remains, when life is more or less approaching its last breath, then it is really fun to listen to the sermon of the heap of kammic fruit in the material and mental khandhas. Old age, sickness, and death do not descend from the pulpit. Feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness also do not descend from the pulpit. Impermanence, suffering and not-self also do not descend from the pulpit. Akāliko, the timeless, is present at all times and preaches at all times. The Noble Truths, all four of them, preach their sermon at all times. People who listen to the sermon truthfully, who practise and contemplate truthfully, who recognise truthfully, who escape doubt truthfully step by step, also exist at all times. People who correctly attain the end of suffering also exist at all times.

In contrast, there are also people at all times who do not want to hear the sermon at all. There are also those who are willing to listen to the sermon but who bend the Dhamma down to honour the defilements. For example, there are also those who bend it by picking out numbers and bits and pieces,[298] thereby seeing the wrong as right and thus siding with the defilements. There are also those who practise generosity, observe ethical precepts and meditate in order to achieve worldly goals. The four types of lotus flowers[299] also exist at all times.

Akāliko can be reduced in short to two kinds, the worldly and the supramundane. Paccattaṁ can also be reduced to two kinds. [The two terms] have one and the same meaning. The same is true of *svākkhāto Bhagavatā Dhammo.*[300] The Dhamma, which the Blessed One has so well proclaimed in his great compassion, both in the mundane and supramundane fields, this he has proclaimed according to the respective stages of practice of practising humans, devas, māras, and brahmas: that which is on the side of causes and on the side of effects for practitioners; that which has been accepted by reason, as far as the imagination can reach.

The fruit of arahantship and old kamma

As for the fruit of arahantship, it lacks any temporality; it cannot be tied to any cause because it is already far beyond causes. It cannot be dragged back to deal with causes because the bridge to the causes that lie within is completely cut off. It is not possible to drag it back into dependency on causes. The path to arahantship and all that lies below it are still dependent on causes. But the cause for the path to arahantship is the most subtle cause in the Buddha's teaching. And as for the fruit, which is devoid of all temporality and cause, well, it is the most subtle fruit in the Buddha's teaching. It has nothing to do with guessing, supposing and speculating, which would degrade it to a Dhamma on the level of "Battleship", where crosses and circles got mixed up.[301] This fruit of complete freedom from greed, hatred and delusion is the final paccattaṁ and *sandiṭṭhiko** of the Buddha's teaching.

Normally, in humans, devas, māras and brahmas, the heart, mindfulness and wisdom are on the same level as the world, making it clear that one's view corresponds to that level; whether this is expressed verbally or not is irrelevant. But the Supreme Teacher has not certified that a person is purified solely through knowledge and vision. Those, however, who are already free from greed, hatred and delusion – yes, they are truly purified. But for the most part, people even pass off their knowledge and vision that are still subject to the defilements as being the final purification. There are even people who have not yet attained any path, any fruit at any of the levels of the noble ones, but nevertheless barge into the debate, either directly or indirectly because they would like so much to have attained something, even though this is not the case at all. But that again depends on kamma and the results of kamma. Kamma and the results of kamma are a really extremely subtle matter. Even arahants do indeed have old kammic results that follow them, but they have no present or future kamma. These old kammic results, however, only come upon an uninhabited building, namely the five bare khandhas themselves. And there are no defilements that grasp that empty, abandoned building, i.e. the five khandhas, as their owner. For they are khandhas, which have no owner that can be fooled by them.

They have already been laid down as paṁsukūla. It is as if one wanted to burn the spit that has been emptied from a spittoon with fire. This, of course, does not upset the owner of the spit at all, and it does not lead to any enmity or danger.

Those who no longer need to guard their hearts

"Yes, and what about our author here?" Answer: He writes in accordance with his bodily, verbal and mental formations. It is not possible to determine purification or non-purification based on writing and reading, for purification and non-purification must remain on the insecure shore, on the fāk of writing and reading, and turn back from there. They cannot go beyond the insecure shore to search for the future and the past. It depends on what the jurisdiction of the Dhamma finds out in the present. Whether the investigation is correct or incorrect also depends on the jurisdiction of the Dhamma in the present. The past court is already over, and the future court has not yet arrived. The present court can therefore decide alone. If the present court is not biased, it will make sufficiently sound and fair decisions. If it is biased, it will sometimes decide too leniently and sometimes too harshly. To be biased means that the defilements are still present in large quantities. The atoms of the defilements pull and suck until one can no longer see up from down.

The Dhamma, the teaching of the fully Awakened One, is more profound and subtle than all other religions. A human being with little potential, in whom the five spiritual faculties and the five spiritual powers are weakly developed, naturally finds it difficult to gain access to it. According to Him, these five faculties and powers, which are five aspects of strength, should be brought into balance, namely: saddhā, confidence in things that should be trusted, for example, that good deeds lead to good results and bad deeds to bad results, that there is good and evil, that there is path, fruit and Nibbāna. For example. Confidence that the five ethical precepts, the eight ethical precepts, the ten ethical precepts, the Pāṭimokkha rules or other decrees of the Buddha and the higher right conduct are beneficial for those who can observe and practise them. This

applies both on the mundane and supramundane levels and depends on the individual case, on the individual causes and effects. The same is true of saddhā itself, confidence in things that should be trusted: it applies to both the mundane and supramundane levels and again depends on the individual case. The same is true of viriya, energy, sati, mindfulness, samādhi, concentration, and paññā, wisdom.

Why I have dealt with ethics in such a specific way: when the Buddha's teaching refers to sīla, samādhi, and paññā as being the basic principle and the entrance into the Buddha's teaching, it is referring to sīla, samādhi, and paññā at the level of a stream-enterer and upwards, one who has entered the supramundane level with the "next step" and no longer falls back and circles around, as is the case with sīla, samādhi, paññā in worldly limitation. They have left their worldly lineage behind and do not doubt the path of practice or their own progress.

This raises the question: "Well, and the arahant – can an arahant be understood in terms of ethics, concentration, wisdom, or not?" And the answer comes without hesitation: Yes, an arahant can be understood in terms of Great Liberation Ethics, Great Liberation Concentration and Great Liberation Wisdom, but these are not mere imitations. They unite in one and the same moment, in every position of the heart, and one does not have the problems of a prison guard in order to keep them because one is dealing with things in which there is no evil mixed in, not even a little bit. Someone who still needs to watch out and someone who still has to deal with evil – they have the same meaning. Why should someone whose heart is already free of evil still need to watch out? But as long as one has not yet attained arahantship, one simply must continue to guard the heart. If one didn't take care of it, that would be really truly wrong, whether to a lesser or greater extent.

The eye, ear, throat, nose, tongue, body, forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and objects of touch are not particularly important because their only function is to send mail to the city of the heart. The heart, which examines the mail, is the important authority. Yes, and once the heart knows, where does it lean? The heart must observe the

heart wisely, especially with regard to cause and effect. The heart should not be joyfully excited about new mail arriving. That is of no consequence, because it is always just old mail and old topics that have always come in with merry regularity. When the heart is on a low level, then after receiving mail, it will love some things, hate some things, and be indifferent to some things. The word "indifferent" means that the mail is neither loveable nor hateful. A heart at a high level simply leaves it at knowing, simply at seeing. (Here knowing means "knowing with wisdom". Here seeing means "seeing with wisdom".) As for the heart at the middle level and mindfulness and wisdom at the middle level, the heart will bow to its own mindfulness and wisdom in many ways, following them, following its own discretion as far as seems appropriate; because the following applies: nānācittaṁ, nānādhammaṁ.[302]

One who does not cling to the heart, does not cling to the Dhamma, does not cling to the "knower" – that is the arahant, because the knowledge of an arahant is already equal to the heart, the Dhamma, the "knower". Whether heart, Dhamma or the "knower", they consequently have no poison whatsoever, they are not a condition that could attach itself anywhere and thus become the uninterrupted sequence of cause and effect that is connected with birth and leads to circling in the round of saṁsāra.[303] Ignorance, the essence of delusion and stupidity, was destroyed by *maggapaññāñāṇa*, the clear wisdom knowledge of the path, and became *mahāsammāvimutti*, the Great Right Liberation, and *mahāsammāñāṇasāmaggī*, the Great Right Coherence of Knowledge,[304] which are interconnected and attracting each other, in one and the same moment. For there is no back and forth, no call for the inner world war of delusion in which the nature of the khandhas used to ferment. There is no opportunity and no occasion for counterrevolution. One could also call it victory in the battle against ignorance, and that would not be wrong. *Saṅkhāra, viññāṇa, nāmarūpa, āyatana, phassa, vedanā, taṇhā*, upādāna*, bhava, jāti, jarā, maraṇa, sokaparidevadomanass'upāyāsa.*[305] There is no need to lecture about them and recite them in order. There is no need to drag them to and fro as *anuloma* and *paṭiloma*, forwards and backwards because it does not matter at which point they were interrupted. They have then all

been sufficiently destroyed, for the simple reason that they all formed a single strand, a single noose, a single link, closed in a circle. No matter where it was interrupted and broken, it is enough for everything, it solves everything, liberates everything, without a doubt.

Welcoming the present

Some venerable ones say, "I am already completely disenchanted with the past and the future, have completely left them behind, and nowadays dwell only in the present." This indeed comes up. But I, the author, see it this way: to welcome the present means to be on the right path in practice, to be correctly on the path of meditation, but without having attained liberation at the level of an arahant. One is merely progressing along this or that path and has achieved this or that result. This is not yet the fruit of arahantship. It may merely be the drinking in of pīti, rapture, that is content with samatha and vipassanā in the present. And then one is deceived by the clinging that mistakes dwelling in the present for Nibbāna. Dwelling in the present is not Nibbāna, it's just the path towards Nibbāna. Through the power of the path coherence, which is the coherence of ethics, concentration and wisdom, these unite their powers in one and the same moment. There is nothing that comes before or after at the level that is attached to the present mind and the present Dhamma. It is not that the end of the path has been reached. It can only be expressed in this way: one is simply on the right path.

Those who have already attained the fruit of arahantship are no longer attached to the past, future or present; they no longer have anything to do with them, nor with empty nothingness or non-empty non-nothingness nor anything else. If someone is attached to any aspect of the present, then there is also *paṭisandhiviññāṇa,*[306] there is birth, there is death in that very present mind and present Dhamma. Ambitions in the present mind and present Dhamma are the source of suffering and a very subtle form of craving. And when it comes to subtle forms of craving, then there are also subtle forms

of grasping, being, birth, ageing, death and so on within, even if one does not remember these things in detail or talk about them.

In this way the cause lies in the present, and finally one loses sight of realistic self-assessment and conceives oneself to be already completely liberated. This is for the following reason: one identifies oneself with the present and identifies the present with oneself from these two perspectives. This splits further into two additional aspects, making a total of four, namely: one identifies others with the present and identifies the present with others. If one conceives that one is completely in the present and that the present is within oneself, then one will not fall into the mistake of grasping the past and future as a self, an I, a someone, a being, a person. It may be that nothing of this remains. It is only that mindfulness and wisdom are not sharp enough, and therefore one misunderstands and overestimates oneself, thinking that one has already overcome the issue of past and future. This overestimation of oneself is, of course, precisely the lifeline of the defilements. Wherever one turns to oppose them, one cannot gain the upper hand. The past, future and present are like a fish, whose head and tail one doesn't eat because they are not tasty. But the middle part is too tempting, and so one cannot help but eat it. And then one claims, "I didn't eat the fish at all!" One cannot get away with it; one may be clever and cunning, but when one finds oneself face to face with a person who possesses wisdom so sharp that they can see through the defilements of the heart, they will already know. They don't need to be able to dive into the earth like a fish or fly like a bird; they will still know, and they won't be wrong.

Wisdom is, of course, the leader of all kinds of dhammas, both supramundane and even mundane. In a worldly, rather crude sense: in order to lead a group, party, faction, battalion or army, for example, one must appoint a wise person as leader. In the field of the Buddha's teaching, they are called paṇḍits. *Paṇḍitā parināyakā.* Only a paṇḍit should be the leader of body and speech, that is, a heart that possesses wisdom. *Natthi bālā parināyakā.* A fool should not be the leader. A foolish heart should not be the leader of body and speech. This should be taken to heart and put into practice in the realm of the highest Dhamma, for clear insight and favourable

practice, as opanayiko, without wavering and deviating from the original principles.

All thinking and pondering that comes out of the stable of the heart must return to the stable. Who is the owner of the heart? A heart that has defilements will naturally take up the heart as the self and the self as the heart. A heart that has no defilements haunting it does not get caught up in any knots, whether it proclaims and decrees something or not. This is Dhamma in the Buddha's teaching, as profound as it can be. Oh, dear world! For this reason, the Supreme Teacher, as a newly Awakened One, showed a demeanour of weariness when it came to instructing the world. And it is the custom of all Buddhas to show such a demeanour at first. This then moves a brahma to ask [for instruction], as is the custom.

Customs and Dhammavinaya

If one takes the word *custom* literally,[307] then this custom branches out, in short, into two types: worldly custom and supramundane custom, the custom of the fully awakened Buddha, the custom of the paccekabuddha, the custom of the male followers, the custom of the female followers, the custom of the path and fruit of stream-entry, the custom of the path and fruit of the once-returner, the custom of the path and fruit of the non-returner, the custom of the path and fruit of arahantship. No matter what custom it is, it has morality according to the Dhammavinaya as its yardstick and limit because it is on the level of the Dhammavinaya, in accordance with the particular stage. It does not take the defilements as being the leader and prime minister of customs because it has already entered into customs that are supramundane.

Worldly customs cannot be taken as a yardstick. There are majorities that exert pressure towards wrong customs. There are majorities that exert pressure towards right customs. There are minorities that exert pressure towards right customs. There are minorities who exert pressure towards wrong customs. Because the way of worldly limitation is not yet practised in choosing Dhammavinaya as its Ācān. Reason is still lacking. Sometimes truly evil

causes are stubbornly and brazenly passed off as good causes, for example causes that belong to all kinds of vices. These, for example, are causes for utter disaster. There is no authority of appeal in the way of Dhammavinaya, and so they stubbornly and brazenly claim that [these vices] lead to growth in consumption and prosperity. They might as well claim that a wheel of blades is a lotus flower.[308] Then they reach out their hands to grab it, tearing their hands in the process, and afterwards they wonder why, because they mistook the wheel of blades for a lotus flower. This is how it usually is with worldly limitations.

That is why the Great Supreme Teacher invested his power and resources in many ways to accumulate the pāramis in saṁsāra, in order to raise beings out of the wrong understanding that sees wrong as right, to move them to recognise right as right, in accordance with cause and effect. He was motivated by his benevolence, for which no measure can be found, by his ocean of great compassion, for which there is really no measure to be found at all. And despite all this, he was only able to raise out as many as the horns of the cow. As for the hairs of the cow, he did not succeed in raising them out. He left that to future Buddhas, according to the kamma and kammic fruits of the beings of the world, in the respective age and on the respective occasion.

Good and bad never obsolete

When I write, I am constantly creating a jumble of the low and the high, the profound and the superficial. As long as I still have some of my life left, I will simply continue to write in the manner of a "knower" with shallow knowledge and in a somewhat old-fashioned way. But actually, there is absolutely no one in this world who is old-fashioned, insofar as good deeds on the right path do not become obsolete, insofar as bad deeds on the wrong path do not become obsolete, insofar as the liberation without remainder from the defilements does not become obsolete in the arahant, in whom the entry into Nibbāna without remainder does not become obsolete through non-obsolescence, where both then come to an end. Below

that, non-obsolescence is dependent on the accumulated causes and effects of both the good and the bad.

Let us return now to the intentions of someone who practises the Buddha's teaching. These can be reduced to and summarised as two types of intention: worldly intention and supramundane intention. Whether it is intention, wish, need, goal, decision or expectation, in their inner essence they have one and the same meaning, one and the same taste. If there are differences, they merely lie in whether they are aimed at slow or quick fulfilment.

Supramundane intentions branch out into many categories. The first category is the aspiration for Buddhahood, sometimes proclaimed, sometimes not, sometimes with the receipt of a prediction of success, sometimes still without, according to the more or less accumulated causes and effects from previous lives, sometimes with faith as the predominant quality, sometimes with wisdom as the predominant quality, and sometimes with energy as the predominant quality.[309] Following one's own right intention to attain Buddhahood, of the kind that has received a prediction of success, is therefore a sure thing. The intention to change to another path does not exist. Below this level, the intentions regarding the various aspirations for Buddhahood may change and take a different path. For example, it is quite possible that the intention may be reduced to the wish for paccekabuddhahood or awakening as a disciple. This is completely uncertain. Some types of people, after their ordination, set out to practise with the intention of attaining liberation in this very lifetime, but as they practise away, they give up because they realize that they will probably not be able to persevere with this approach. And then there are those who change their minds and strive for Buddhahood instead.[310] And [among them] there are those who disrobe and enter the householder life. And those who do not disrobe and remain in the status of one who has gone forth – I do not understand this type very well and have difficulty fathoming them. I would like to leave this aside and ask all those who are knowledgeable to explain it to me.

Those who escape suffering in the present

There are also a great many people who want to become paccekabuddhas, with wisdom, confidence or energy as their predominant characteristic. There are even some who have already received a prediction of success, and others who were not in the right place at the right time to receive such a prediction, depending on how diligent or lax they were in investing energy and resources in their search. There are even more people of the type who want to become the main disciples on the right or left of one of the future Buddhas. There are even more of the type of who want to become disciples like an *etadagga* or a *sukkhavipassako, tevijjo, chaḷabhiñño* or *paṭisambhidappatto,*[311] so many that no measure can be found for them. I cannot lecture on the type of people who strive for worldly wealth or who do not yet know what they want, who simply continue to do good or bad.

These topics all extend outward and analyse other people. I don't think they are especially necessary or important. If I hadn't written [about them] then I would have just waved my hands around to banish sleepiness. If the dear reader finds it tiring to read this, then they should just turn the page. As far as I'm concerned, they don't need to read a single chapter or even a single paragraph, because after all, there are no pictures here,[312] unlike in daily newspapers and weekly magazines. Reading, writing, remembering and thinking are all part of the circle of the physical, verbal and mental formations. They arise, then change and disappear in an uninterrupted sequence. They are by necessity dependent only on the "one who knows" or the "one who doesn't know" according to truth.

People of the kind who intend to escape from suffering in this life and who do not snack in secret, having only this one wish, this one intention, admonish themselves and shake themselves up. They remain within the khõ wat of practice and do not strip the thread of the screw. The topics of gain, fame, praise and external happiness, or times when gain decays, fame decays, praise and glory decay, happiness which is based on external material things decays – these do not count as splinters or thorns in their resolve. There is no melancholy or regret that would make them want to change their

intention and come up with a new plan. People of this kind have already accumulated pāramis in abundance, and some of them have already escaped all snares without remainder. Some are wholly occupied with struggling, paddling and rowing within themselves, in the realm of the heart, with the help of mindfulness and wisdom. They do not rest on their laurels or allow themselves to be satisfied with what they have achieved. Even when the body is at rest, that does not mean that they are sleeping. Even then, tranquillity of mind and insight are both present in harmony. They do not imitate anyone, they do not wobble, waver or doubt. They hold mindfulness and wisdom as keys in the hand of mindfulness and in the hand of wisdom. They have already opened the door through which they can leave delusion behind. Path mind, path heart, path mindfulness and path wisdom unite their powers and become one strand. There is nothing that comes before or after. Fruit mind, fruit heart, fruit mindfulness and fruit wisdom also unite their powers in one and the same moment. There is nothing that comes before or after. They appear simultaneously and at the right time. In this way, they can naturally extinguish the delusion in saṁsāra for themselves, so that it cannot rise again. It can no longer rebel and lead them astray.

From crossing various streams, swamps, canals and ponds, lakes and oceans in the external realm, all the way up to the crossing of external lands, millions of empires and oceans with the help of engines and machines – these do not come close to crossing one's own delusion with the help of true super-wisdom realisation, which has sammāñāṇa, right knowledge, complete in the present mind and present Dhamma, truly before one's eyes. The face of mindfulness and wisdom and the face of the casing of skin, the visage – they are made of different materials and differ from each other. And when we no longer fall for the casing of skin on the face, then it becomes the face of mindfulness, the face of wisdom; they are then present within once more. This is called: the sea of delusion in regard to all kinds of skin could be crossed; the sea of past skin, the sea of future skin and also the sea of present skin. There is no need to talk further about other kinds of material things. They then no longer matter.

Are there really ghosts?

If something comes to mind on a particular topic, I simply write it down in a rather jumbled manner, following the way of bodily, verbal and mental formations, since after all Nibbāna does not write or read anything.

Some people ask, "Are there really ghosts?"[313] To this, the writer must reply, "The questioner uses manoviññāṇa, mind consciousness, to ask. And the answerer uses mind consciousness to answer. Whoever is a board member uses mind consciousness to be a board member."

The one who asks should not ask questions. The one who answers should not answer. The board member should not be a board member. Because it is as if two alcoholics were answering each other's questions. And in turn, it is as if an alcoholic were a board member. It becomes a council of owls because they all have big eyes.[314]

And then: cakkhuviññāṇa, eye consciousness, sotaviññāṇa, ear consciousness, ghānaviññāṇa, nose consciousness, jivhāviññāṇa, tongue consciousness, kāyaviññāṇa, body consciousness, manoviññāṇa, mind consciousness – all these types of consciousness are vassals of manoviññāṇa, and their express telegrams and urgent phone calls have already arrived at manoviññāṇa, including those from the past that have already passed, those from the future that have not yet arrived, and those from the present that are currently present before our eyes. If the realisation is not a match for consciousness, it continues to become paṭisandhiviññāṇa, as an immediate condition, as an immediate cause, as an immediate fruit, as immediate defilements, as immediate kamma, as an immediate result, as immediate birth, as immediate being, or one could also say, as immediate being, immediate birth.

In the spheres of the dependent co-arising, *paṭiccasamuppāda**, things are interrelated and form a chain. Do greed, hatred and delusion form a chain or not? And how do they differ from dependent co-arising? Answer: Of course they form a chain, and they do not differ at all from dependent co-arising. They have one and the same

meaning! Those whose realisation is not a match for dependent co-arising are also one and the same.[315] Those whose realisation is not a match for greed, hatred and delusion are also one and the same, there is no difference whatsoever. Those whose realisation is not a match for the past, future and present, also have one and the same meaning. Those whose realisation is not a match for the heap of name and form, also have exactly the same meaning. Those whose realisation is not a match for the three characteristics, again have one and the same meaning. The term "realisation that is a match for…" does not mean here to know according to perception and memory. Heard, practised and parroted, like the "Yes, yes"-parrot, "eating rice with bananas". Rather, the term means to know in accordance with the truth of genuine liberation. It is about *right* liberation and *right* knowledge [of liberation], not about false liberation and false knowledge.

The effect corresponds to the cause

Someone might want to ask a little question: "Well, what level is our author currently on?" Answer: "This is not a matter that can be debated and negotiated before the court of the Dhamma – which is called *paccattaṁ* – has met. And at the *sandiṭṭhiko* court of the Dhamma, which is the domain of the liberated and the non-liberated in succession, they should please attend to the work of knowing themselves. For this is not a Dhamma that is beyond reach. If it were further out of reach than it is, then it would be a Dhamma that invites one to secretly distort it into a false teaching that cannot be used as a yardstick. Sandiṭṭhiko and paccattaṁ in the Buddha's teaching must obviously have a defined area of application and refer exclusively to the holy life from the initial stage onwards, that is, from stream-entry to arahantship.[316] Otherwise, it would become a hopeless mess which could not be applied as a basic principle.

To put it in a more detailed way: whenever someone does good or bad within the realm of worldly limitations, they are aware of it, with the exception of those who have no idea whatsoever of what is good and what is bad. But even they, in turn, have not escaped paccattaṁ and sandiṭṭhiko. This is because even a person who

believes that good and evil do not exist knows about themselves: "I believe that good and evil do not exist at all. Full stop." In this way, content can be presented that is handed over to the particular ego as a monopoly, in both the worldly and the supramundane field."

When I think about something, I write it down in a rather jumbled way, like an old-fashioned, outdated person. But old age, sickness, and death never become outdated. They exist at all times. Things that are subject to the formations also exist at all times. Things that are free from the formations also exist at all times. The path of practice to escape the things that are subject to the formations also exists at all times. There is nothing old-fashioned – whether good things or bad things, one can do them at any time. They simply want to become causes for results. Even if one doesn't want them, one will get them in the price range that corresponds to the accumulated causes – be it little or much. Whether one follows a good or bad path depends on causes, as the principle of the Lord of Cause and Effect, that is, the principle of the heart.

The arahants are completely exempt from this because they have no grasping whatsoever that would cause them to wait for gains and losses to come to them through cause and effect. They are no longer the Lord of Cause and Effect or of anything else. For they have sent all causes and effects back to the formations. These will never again return to the arahants to hijack them. This is Dhamma, which is already beyond cause and effect. Heart cause, heart effect, Dhamma cause, Dhamma effect have one and the same meaning, one and the same taste. An arahant does not cling to this taste of the heart, nor to this taste of Dhamma. For a heart that relies on causes and effects, or Dhamma that relies on causes and effects, is a heart, is Dhamma that is not yet up to complete liberation from delusion. A heart that still relies on the principle of cause and effect, or Dhamma that still relies on the principle of cause and effect, corresponds at best only to the anāgāmi, the non-returner. I do not wish to disparage the anāgāmi in any way here. I am speaking here in terms of Dhamma at a high level.

Where there is cause and effect of the heart, there is also cause and effect of Dhamma. They are so closely connected that they are

almost indistinguishable. There is nothing that comes before or after. A coarse example would be closing and opening one's eyes. The effect of darkness and light naturally occurs at the same moment as the closing and opening of the eyes. They are connected with each other in a tightly interwoven time interval. Yes, this even applies to cause and effect in the mental factors that arise in the mind while one is thinking! They are connected with each other in a tightly interwoven structure of overlapping.[317]

They form *santati*, a sequence without gaps or temporal interruptions. Moreover, they also arise and cease quickly. When someone interferes and grasps them as an owner, then there is even less of an opening clause or final clause. This is the super wheel of saṁsāra, the super circle of saṁsāra, the immediate super cause, the immediate super effect, immediate super being, immediate super birth, immediate super ignorance. An end to this cannot be easily reached, nor an escape from doubt in the Dhamma at this stage, nor a clear view of the three characteristics. The little that can be seen of this takes place only in the gross physical body. But that is still better than not recognising anything at all in the body.

Once the true knowledge of the body is clearly present, the true knowledge of other things follows on its own. But it is important to understand that the body is not the Lord of Cause and Effect in regard to good and evil, virtue and vice. It stands at the beginning of cause and effect merely as a servant of the mind, the mental factors and the defilements. (The arahant is completely exempt from this because they have no defilements that could corrupt them or secretly call upon their services.)

A saddened heart or a cheerful heart

If someone has the need for a quick escape from suffering in the present birth, in the present heart, in the present Dhamma, but has no interest in the Venerable Ānāpānassati, in mindfulness of breathing in and out, does not rely on it, does not love it, and does not practise it constantly and to an ever-increasing degree, but only sits or lies there, simply waiting and wishing for it, then it will

naturally be difficult to achieve. And the air flowing in and out short or long will then in no way become the body.[318] Or for that matter, the contemplation of the body, kāyānupassanā. Or for that matter, the earth, water, fire and wind elements in interaction.

So, once one is able to breathe in and out [mindfully], sometimes one experiences happiness when breathing in and out, sometimes suffering, sometimes equanimity – this is exactly the observation of feelings, vedanānupassanā. When breathing in and out, one sees the heart as saddened, cheerful or balanced – this is exactly the contemplation of the heart, cittānupassanā. When breathing in and out, one sees the impermanence of the formations of body and heart – this is exactly the contemplation of Dhamma, Dhammānupassanā. (There is no need to systematise this, that doesn't matter!) And the body, feeling or heart are elevated to vassals of the three characteristics, woven together into a rope of three strands, as one and the same target. There is no need to separate, systematise or expand. One sees what lies before the eyes of mindfulness and wisdom, together with the in and out breath. There is nothing that comes before or after. They are connected and are contemplated together without interruption.

The pleasures, the intoxication and the floundering in all worlds, including the past and future ones, may well join forces and come in through some door. And because the present has power over the past and future worlds, they will not only engage in a dispute with the present as to whose vassal the present is and who grasps it as its owner, they will also engage in a close battle of cutting and stabbing in that present. But do not forget the breath! For the breath is a magnet and the original teacher. However subtle the breath may be, do not forget it! Otherwise, the mind will wander like a paper kite with a broken string. It will become like a blacksmith who does not strike a piece of iron on the anvil correctly. The piece of iron will bounce off and fly into his face. This point is particularly important.

Hiders are not fighters

But meditation pros who focus on breathing in and out are often keen to enjoy the breath as it becomes finer and more subtle. The breath disappears, and it's not obvious whether there is any breath left at all. When the power [of concentration] is used up, they pull themselves out of this state having gained virtually nothing of significance for themselves. The only thing of significance they have gained is a temporary well-being in body and mind. And so they become hiders, not fighters. The problems of mind and heart continue to spread their arms to a considerable extent. Honestly, such an approach only gives a foretaste; getting stuck there prevents further progress.

But not resting in this way is also not an option. Yet if one is often only interested in resting, simply no further work will be done. The work is not yet finished, right? And time in every life is limited. The term "great birth"[319] refers to the time span between inhalation and exhalation and is understood as one lifespan of the formations of the body. As for the formations of the heart, they arise and pass away in rapid succession. This is truly extremely subtle impermanence. When impermanence becomes more subtle, no matter to what extent, then suffering and not-self also become more subtle – as one and the same target, in one and the same moment. If one is still zigzagging along the wrong path, one will see with even less clarity, one won't be able to trust oneself, and will also rebel inwardly.

Someone who gives up the meditation practice they had previously set out to pursue will naturally chase after the most diverse and varied external nimittas. Nimitta means symbol. One perceives them in many different ways and attaches meaning to them. Meanings and analogies are only good for "as if" and "such as", but surely not for the true essence. That is all one gets from nimittas. Someone who clings to nimittas based on upacārabhāvanā, well, they will probably not easily lower themselves to other people. When faced with people who want to give them advice, they will inwardly claim that these people cannot meditate as well as they can and that those others are just trying to instruct them. At that moment, our

good fellow plunges prematurely into hell. So, it is difficult to correct anyone in this world, no matter what level they are stuck on because this is not something that can simply be pulled out like a thorn. The only exception is if one recognises the disadvantage of the level in question, in which case one can turn oneself around. For some, turning around only takes place in the afternoon or the evening. Afternoon here refers to old age, and evening means that death has already occurred several days before.

Ānāpānassati is the meditation of the first level in the Buddha's teaching. It is also the peak of all forms of meditation. Those who are practised and proficient in it can bring this meditation together with the wisdom of the development of insight, vipassanābhāvanāpaññā. There is no contradiction or incompatibility between them. An example: *nirodha**, the cessation of craving, is a subtle dhamma that can be brought together with the inhalation and exhalation and observed together. A single medicine that can cure millions of diseases is this mindfulness of breathing. It can alleviate and heal all kinds of defilements and cravings, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the practitioner's circumstances, and it does so in an entirely straightforward manner, without detours. All that is required is that confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom are fully employed, with zeal and without interruption.

Nibbidā, disenchantment, loosens the intoxication with delusion in which the nature of the khandhas has been fermenting for a long, long time, and will manifest as Sammāvimutti, right liberation, and Sammāñāṇa, right knowledge, with absolute certainty and assurance. There is nothing to doubt. Don't throw in the towel, then everything will be fine. Don't claim to know that the path, fruit and Nibbāna have disappeared. Be careful to speak in accordance with the Buddha's teaching, but if the idea occurs to you to pass it off as your own knowledge, then you have once again fallen prey to self-overestimation.

If someone is no longer interested in mindfulness of breathing, well then they will not easily recognise the mental factors arising and passing away because they are not following the breath, penetrating to the mind and the mental factors. If they cannot thoroughly

recognise arising and passing away, well, then they will not be able to thoroughly recognise the three characteristics. That nibbidā, disenchantment, which can loosen all delusion, opens any door or window to reveal itself to the eye of wisdom realisation, well, that is then of course completely impossible, either in the past, in the future, or in the present world. The Great Supreme Teacher preached and taught from his super-compassion-virtue, for which no measure can be found, for a full 45 years, emphasising the three characteristics more than any other Buddha-adage because they are a Dhamma with which liberation is more easily possible.

There are a few minor, insignificant topics that aren't exactly the backbone, but which are nevertheless among the topics I should write a little about. Sometimes there is someone in the practice samnak who likes to read the scribbles and writings, and who is, on top of this, the head of the samnak. And so he has to be interested in them, and not just a little. In the community of monks and novices who live together for the purpose of practice, the ability comes up to notice every aspect and every corner of the samnak. It may be that there are inappropriate things that go beyond what is beneficial – even if one cannot carry them along to Nibbāna, that is true – but they should nevertheless be contemplated; for everyone is free to engage in contemplation in any area. Otherwise, one could not become a clever person.

The head of a group in a community is an important matter. He is, of course, an explicit target for people's attention everywhere. Criticism and conflict have always existed; they certainly belong to the customs of the world. Nevertheless, one should take care of the things that are not beyond one's reach. The process of caring and doing, these things probably have the same meaning. For, caring about things that should be cared about, doing things that should be done, avoiding things that should be avoided, being punctual in things that require punctuality, careful handling of things that should be handled carefully – these are the essence and the next step in the search for high Dhamma.

Considering heart and Dhamma

This practice for path, fruit and Nibbāna, as a test for oneself and for future generations, naturally does not favour any particular time in life – youth, middle age or old age. Even if one can no longer walk, cannot move from the spot and is confined to bed, Dhamma must still be there as a tool of consideration for the heart that is suitable and appropriate for oneself.

When the inner khõ wat of the heart and this inner Dhamma move away from each other, they take off and run wild. The time of the body can also be understood as external time, which is not wrong. The time of the heart and of Dhamma is inner time. They interact with each other in subtle and profound ways. Courageous, determined mindfulness and wisdom will therefore be able to see what there is to see. They will know what is appropriate and what is not appropriate, and will be able to choose and select among them in a clear and unambiguous way. Right mindfulness and wisdom can therefore choose the right heart and the right Dhamma, especially the right things that concern the heart and Dhamma. Otherwise, one will swallow fish bones and other bones, without choosing, without selecting, without considering. And this, in turn, has one and the same meaning: choosing the heart, choosing the Dhamma, considering the heart, considering the Dhamma, no matter what it is in the world or in the Dhamma.

If one uses Dhamma as a magnifying glass when considering something, and has taken precautions to ensure that the thread of the Dhamma screw won't be repeatedly stripped, then it is unlikely that one will make a misstep in that stage. Or if a certain misstep does occur, then there is also a doorway to remedy it. If something is wrong and there is no doorway to remedy it, then it is because contemplation was lacking before setting one's hand to it. Setting one's hand to something does not refer exclusively to the external hand, the hand of flesh, bones, veins, tendons and skin, but also to the hand of mindfulness and wisdom working together in an interplay with the heart, with Dhamma. That contemplation then makes automatic decisions, disregarding the true Dhamma so well proclaimed by the Blessed One, that must not be! If the defilements of

the ego are still firm and fixed, then arbitrary decisions and choices will always take the side of the defilements, and one no longer knows oneself.

Magnifying glass for the heart

Someone who is able to choose heart and Dhamma on their own initiative after careful consideration will hardly make many mistakes. That is, at the beginning of the holy life on the path of the Buddha's teaching, there are some defilements that will naturally cease to be part of their being, according to the principle of the stream-enterer and upwards. Below this level, one naturally gropes in the dark and tends to overestimate oneself in relation to one's own level of heart and Dhamma, as it may appear to oneself at the moment. The mind then resembles an ordinary crow that collects the fancy tail feathers and crown feathers of a peacock in the forest and sticks them into its own feathers in order to be something special among all the other crows. This is, of course, something artificial. One is not yet capable of the real thing. It is simply a fake. Although one can create artificial celestial bodies in today's world, one says right from the outset that they are artificial celestial bodies, not real ones.[320] They have put on dance masks that suit them, that are right for them, that fit them. And whether these celestial bodies are artificial or real, it has, after all, nothing to do with defilements. If someone is not familiar with artificial stars and real stars but clings to the word "star, star," then this will turn into defilements because they are clinging to external conventions. The defilements have truly emerged from the heart. They have truly emerged from things that are subjects to formations in the material realm, which the mind has concocted to serve as offerings for the worship of God Aniccaṁ.

All three world spheres are vassals of Dhamma Aniccaṁ. Dhammas on the side of the formations have the same meaning. When formations clog, stuff, and overpopulate all three world spheres, then the task is to rely on higher meritorious formations as a condition, to rely on the practice as being the provisions for the journey.

At the beginning of the holy life according to the Buddha's teaching, the word "merit" refers to supramundane merit that has a framework and follows principles, starting from the merit of stream-entry and upwards. Below this level, it refers to worldly merit that has no certain outcome. There are many "maybes" here. Maybe it is the next step. Maybe it is a stagnation. Maybe it will go downhill again. Not so on the level of merit and heart of a stream-enterer. The level of mind, heart, merit and Dhamma of one who has entered the stream is a super-level, one which leads exclusively to the next step. There is no longer any fall to lower levels of existence. They have already left the puthujjhana, the ordinary person, behind. They have closed the four abysses of existence, which are: hell, pretas of all kinds, and animals of all kinds.[321] *Supaṭipanno*, practising the good, avoiding the coarse – this group is already advancing safely. There is no regret or melancholy arising from offences. They have a magnifying glass to view the path and the heart which is not blurry. They can recognise the genuine, true wellbeing that lies ahead of them at each stage. The ball of tangles is untangled, and there is no longer any regret or melancholy arising from relapses.

Streaming and whirling around in saṁsāra

For some people, their fivefold ethics still has gaps. There is also no clear line when it comes to earning a living. They sell pictures, sell coins,[322] and sometimes they have good days and sometimes bad days. This extends to all kinds of vices that they cannot give up. They trade in weapons, live animals and animals that they themselves have slaughtered for food. They deal in intoxicating drinks and all kinds of poison, and on top of that they believe in all kinds of omens. For example, they believe in clues to the right lottery numbers. They engage in various superstitious practices, associate with bad friends, harmful friends, false friends, not real friends. They associate with friends who lure them onto the path of ruin. They associate with friends who tempt them to drink. Who tempt them to wander around in the middle of the night, to wander around watching gambling and enjoying it. Who tempt them to

gamble. They are not sufficiently equipped with confidence in Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. They do not believe enough in the fruits of ethics and generosity. As well, their mindfulness and wisdom are still very weak. Occasionally they pray to spirits, mythical creatures and devas. They are quarrelsome and hostile, insult and curse other beings, wish them harm in their thoughts or even with words. They are jealous or envious in many ways. These are a few examples.

But… but… but: they consider themselves to be stream-enterers! This assessment is once again completely misguided because of a lack of self-knowledge. A sotāpanna of this kind deserves the designation: sotā-bummer, stream-mentioner, sotā-blunder, one who streams and whirls around in saṁsāra without a place in the queue that leads out of the endless loop.[323] I must give free rein to my rambling thoughts here, as a donation to King Aniccaṁ, who sits on the throne and guards all three worlds. He is the head of the armed forces of the three characteristics. Once one has gotten to know him well, one will probably no longer go astray in the Dhamma.

The good doesn't just fall from the sky

Whether the scribbling down and writing of documents and sacred texts turns out well or badly depends on the person who selects, chooses and contemplates. According to the Dhamma of the Buddha's teaching, there is no dogma of blind faith. Even if one agrees to believe something just to avoid further bother, one will soon rebel against it. The heart is not peaceful, in the way it happens by itself when faith is coupled with wisdom. The fact that human beings can experience a gradual purification of mind and heart lies precisely in the heart which recognises correctly and practises correctly, equipped with Dhamma at a high and ascending level. Good and not good do not come from the external, from earth, from the sky or from outer space, which are the things that are of interest to the people of the world. If that were the case, the noble ones would have to degrade themselves to puthujjanas, worldlings, in years of drought or flood. In years of good weather and good rain, they could put the crown of the noble ones back on their heads.

When I am not telling stories or speaking in rhyme, bodily, verbal and mental formations cause me to write in circles in this way. The honourable reader who carries the Venerable Mindfulness and Venerable Wisdom with them naturally has fun with this and soaks it up with equanimity. But if one gets stuck at a low level of equanimity or at the level of vipassanā, then it turns into equanim-muddy[324] because one gets stuck in it on the way to the equanimity of an arahant. It is, of course, the duty of those who want to finish learning, finish the practise and finish attaining liberation to internalise all of this, *opana-yiko-yika.*

I wanted to say something about a new topic, but it is actually an old topic because the formations of the heart are old. The Dhamma is also old; no new Dhamma comes from anywhere. *Esa dhammo sanantano.* Dhamma is something old.[325] The term "something old" has both a positive and a negative connotation. It depends on the person who is choosing and selecting. But some people say that they want to choose real gold, and yet they end up with fool's gold. That happens. They want to choose good vegetables, and yet they end up with vegetables full of caterpillars. That happens. They want to choose something good and instead end up with "something good".[326] That happens very often. And the word "arahant" is part of the old vocabulary. The word "puthujjana" is also part of the old vocabulary. Dark and bright are also something old. Drunkards have also been around since old ages. Teetotallers have also been around since old ages.

Well, with this, all objections to the expression "something old" are gone. Once all objections to the subject of "something old" are gone, all objections to the subject of "something new" are also gone. The assertion that everything remains the same old stuff belongs to the highest Dhamma. The assertion that there is both old and new belongs to convention, for convention is shallower in meaning than the highest sense. (It is like different types of water – deep, shallow, clear, clean water, fresh water and nice cool water – which cannot be compared.) So if one wants to raise objections it would be futile. Then the objection arises: "If there is nothing old and nothing new, then why not eat rotten, spoiled food? Yes, and why not dress in rags? Why use new cloth?" Well, someone who says that every-

thing remains the same old stuff and that this is profound Dhamma is not saying that someone who emphasises the old has no idea about the new in the conventional sense. It is an invitation to observe in the realm of wisdom, a skilful means for not allowing oneself to be misled by new and old things within.

Normally, people have many defilements. They tend to cling a million percent to things that convention labels as "new, new". When one falls for the new and gets stuck on it, one also falls for the old within oneself and gets stuck on it. When one conceives convention wrongly, one also conceives liberation wrongly. When one is blinded by skin, one also is blinded by bones. When one is not blinded by skin, one is not blinded by bones in the slightest. There is no need to elaborate further on this point. This topic of being deluded, dull and dumb has no first and no final clause for ignorance. If one is already able to cross the sea of delusion completely with the help of genuine Venerable Mindfulness and Venerable Wisdom, then one can leave the world behind with a single snap of the fingers. If, instead, one tries to do so with the help of engines and machines, or by hovering or flying externally at any speed for millions of years, one will not succeed in leaving the world behind at all.

One deluded by the "knower"

The question arises: So, what method can be used to go beyond delusion? A very short answer, to make it easy for the reader: One can go beyond the one who knows the "knower"[327] by absolutely not clinging to the "knower" as being me or someone or a being or a person or a self, not even for a single mind moment. And that is then called the complete, final going beyond of delusion in every respect.

A further question: How does the one who knows the "knower" differ from formations?

The one who knows the "knower" is himself a formation of a subtle and refined nature; for he arises in a subtle way, and he ceases in a very subtle way. He arises, changes, and passes away

simultaneously, in the same moment. There is no before and no after, and it is woven together like a net. If mindfulness and wisdom are not hot on the heels of the one who knows the "knower", one wants to know exactly whether arising and passing away take place. But when the one who knows the "knower" arises and passes away so quickly and subtly, one comes to the view and conclusion that the "knower" is Nibbāna. This is, of course, like a snake eating its own tail. This, of course, cannot be. Nibbāna is not the offspring or little brother of the "knower" and does not concern itself with the "knower". Nor does it come and proclaim zero or not zero.[328] To put on some kind of self as a theatre mask is the business of a "knower" who does not even know his own shadow. And that then leads on and on to subtle being, subtle birth without self-knowledge.

Dhamma that is subject to question and answer is Dhamma in groups or pairs that engages [with the "knower"], in contrast [to Nibbāna]. It smacks of relying on the "knower" as a symbol. But otherwise there is no way to explain these questions and answers and to question them. One must use the khandhas ripened by kamma and the "knower", which ask and answer each other's questions, as a pulpit. True Nibbāna comes to no one in order to ask and answer questions. To give a crude example: earth, sky and space do not come to the "knower" in order to ask and answer questions, nor do they come to the "not-knower". The same goes for Nibbāna. Nibbāna doesn't come along and tell its autobiography, which other people then hold up as sacred texts. If the "knower" knows and practises correctly, then that is merely the path towards Nibbāna. But it is not the true essence of Dhamma – Nibbāna.

If, at death, one remains stuck with the one who knows the "knower", there is still attachment to the "knower", and a heart of a refined kind is then born in a formless Brahma World. Birth, ageing and death have not yet been truly escaped. Practitioners of the Buddha's teaching who are hoping to escape the suffering in saṁsāra quickly, safely and genuinely, for the most part, remain stuck at this point, but I do not mean to say that no one ever goes beyond this. There are simply far fewer of them, like the horns of a cow compared to the hairs of a cow. Even if there are indeed more

arahants, destroyers of the effluents, who have attained Nibbāna, than stones and grains of sand in the four oceans or in the five oceans or even more, how many countless oceans would the mass of those remaining make up? As already said – the horns and the hairs of the cow – on and on and on …

Now I'm watching myself die

I return once more to that Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue period when I was with Luang Pū Mun, in particular to a time when I was ill and passing blood. Before I became ill and passed blood, I had been carrying firewood on my shoulder to the monastery grounds, a load too much for my strength. It was the rainy season at the time. I quickly brushed the termite trails away while in a kneeling position and continued throwing the firewood in the same rhythm. I had overworked my heart, but didn't pay any attention to it and didn't take care of it afterwards. A few days later, the pain stopped. But after about half a month, I passed blood in strands as thick as a finger. During the time I was passing blood, I had no abdominal pain, but I passed blood several times a day. If I had collected the blood that came out in clumps, it would probably have filled half a spittoon.

I felt very tired that day and lay down in my kuṭi. I lay down on my right side with the feet on top of each other. I raised my right hand and placed it on the pillow. Then I placed my cheek in my hand. The left hand lay stretched out on my side. In my heart I had the thought: "So far, I have only seen other people die. I have never seen myself die. Now I am watching myself die. Will I die while breathing out or breathing in?" So I focused my mindfulness on the place where the air could be felt flowing in and out, and at the same time, with each in-breath and out-breath, I repeated the parikamma word "dying, dying" without interruption. About fifteen minutes later, I changed my mind: "Where should the Dhamma of the Blessed One die away to? That which decays and dies are only formations." And so I redirected my parikamma: "Not dying, not dying." There was no before and after, and I remained like this without interruption for about twenty minutes. The mind became

concentrated, and in an instant it seemed as if I were breaking through the roof of the kuṭi and rising high into the air. There I lay across the air on my right side.

At that moment, I made it clear to myself: "Aha, samādhi! There is no doubt about it." I had no control over how long I remained suspended in the air. When the power [of concentration] was exhausted, I withdrew from it. Upon exiting, I had the feeling that it progressed in the same way as when I entered. And then I noticed again the very light in-and-out flow of the breath. The body also felt extremely light at that moment. The discharge of blood also stopped right at that point. And when the mind had withdrawn, the lying position was just as before, on the right side. There was no change in position to be noticed whatsoever.

It was already late afternoon, around after four o'clock. Luang Pū Mun was bathing, and as usual, not far from my kuṭi, about twenty arm spans away. When Luang Pū spoke, he usually spoke in a loud voice. And so Luang Pū began to speak, "I haven't seen Than Lā today. I don't know where he is." A monk replied, "He is ill and passing blood, if I may say so." After hearing this, the master said in a loud voice, "Oh no, look at that! Now he has crawled into a corner. How will he achieve anything of significance in meditation? Well, we'll see." At the next opportunity, the following day, when it was time to bathe, I was able to fulfil my khõ wat duties among my friends. The master and the friends asked, "You must be well again, seeing as you have come back?" I replied, "Yes, I am well again. But I fell asleep during meditation, and it seemed to me as if I was floating upwards in the air. I was lying sideways in the air on my right-hand side. I don't know how long it lasted, I can't remember. Then I came out of it and saw my breath flowing in and out very lightly." Luang Pū Mun replied, "That wasn't sleep! Your mind had become concentrated at the level of upacārasamādhi."

Cāra means to follow. The pīti, that manifested as floating in mid-air, was not all. During the period when I was with Luang Pū Mun, my nimittas were up to all sorts of wild capers. Sometimes I did walking meditation in the air, sometimes I sat in the air in the lotus position, sometimes I bumped into the roof, sometimes I

floated while lying down. All sorts of things were possible. But I didn't think I was anything special because of this. When the power had gone, I came out again. I contemplated this down to the three characteristics and saw them clearly and free of doubt.

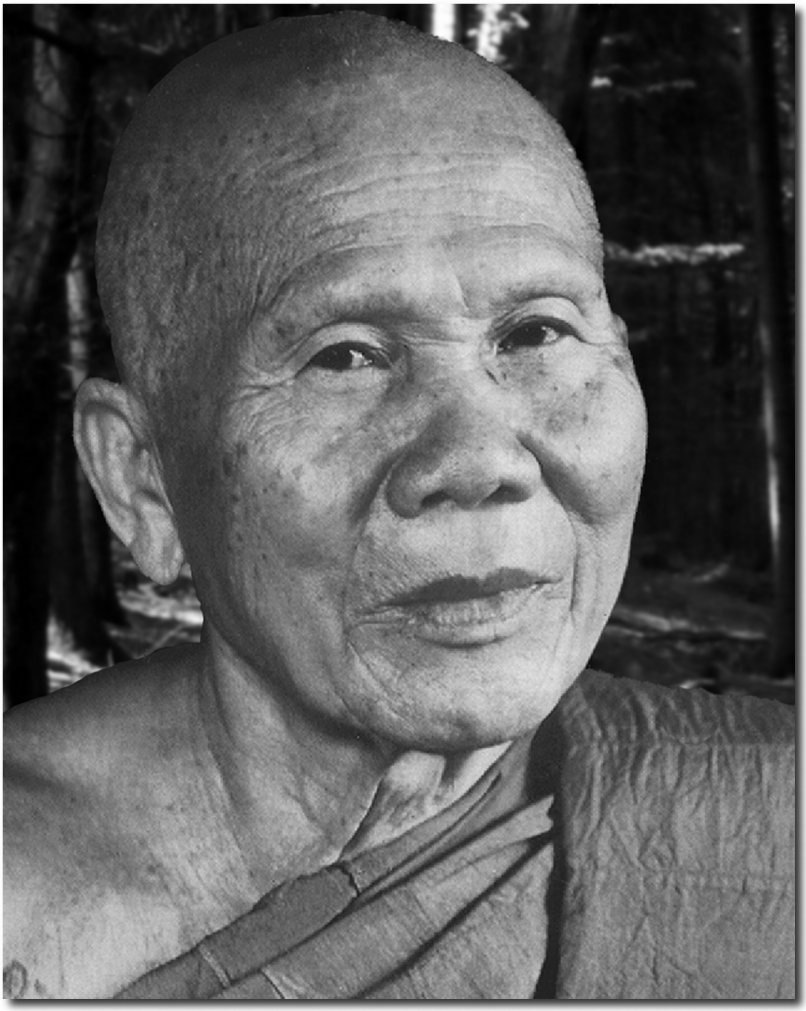
During Luang Pū Mun's time, all the monks and novices in that samnak took special care, competing with each other in contributing and bringing forth effort, whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down – even when they spoke to each other in whispers. Wherever they were, it was just as well not to use their voices at all. Most of the time, they only talked to each other about meditation. Something like this is hard to find in today's world of artificial celestial bodies.

By the way, in Master Luang Pū Mun's khõ wat practice, especially as far as he himself was concerned, first came helping himself, second came accepting the services of his disciples who had asked him for nissaya, and third came the services of lay people and *upāsikās**. The master was extremely punctual, day and night, every time and every day. The reason I am mentioning this and writing about it here is because I have doubts as to whether I may or may not have already written about it [in the chapters] about that phase. If it has been mentioned repeatedly and bores the esteemed readers, I beg your forgiveness.

And by the way, I would like to point out that the report on the Phū Cõ Kõ period only refers to the period up to 1981 and before, and is rather unsystematic. This is not particularly tragic, but it is enough for me to add a few comments. We are now in 1987. I will pick up where I left off in 1981. In the period that followed, Phū Cõ Kõ really flourished because there were many monks and novices who spent the rains retreat here. "Many" being more than thirty. And there were meritorious lay people who came from all directions, for example from the venerable capital. They came to build and build, for example, electricity supply, a path up the mountain and water connection. And a Dhamma hall. In addition, concrete toilets and wooden toilets. Everything was fully equipped, so that I am of the opinion that so much comfort exceeds my kammic potential. Quite possible. But I have not mentioned the names of the good

people in this group, and have not reported on them. And I hope that these good people are not out for prestige and public recognition. Surely they are only interested in the fruits of their wholesome deeds. But probably even that can be known, because there is nothing hidden in this world. With that, I would like to come to the end.

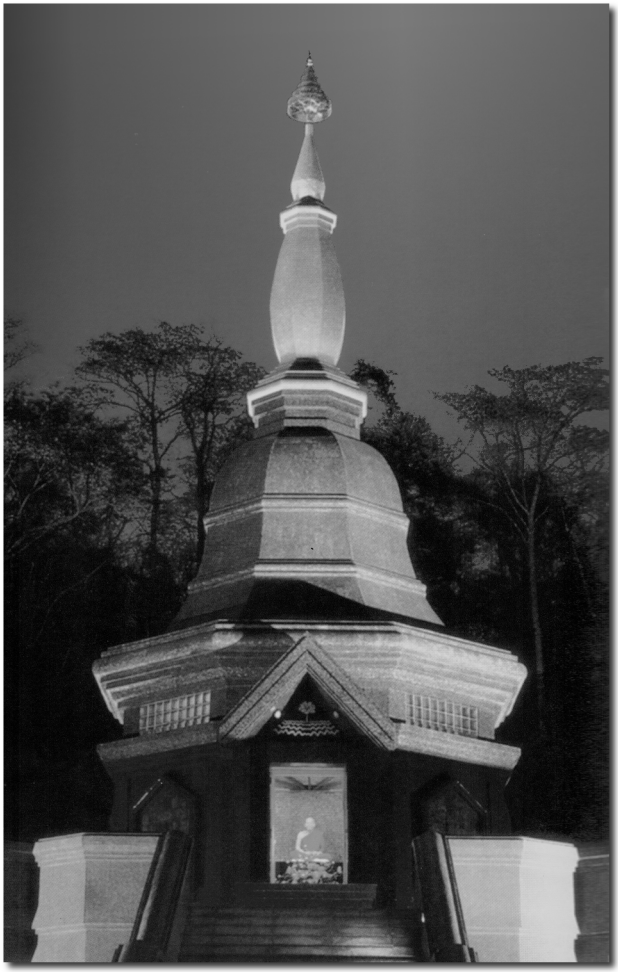
Lā Khemapatto



By the power of Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, may you all truly prosper, reaching the final end of suffering, in all that comes, in all three worlds and at all times. Whether we have met or not, I definitely send out the immeasurables to all three worlds at all times.

Appendix

If one contemplated the three characteristics, whether by day or by night, it was said that one was reciting the "Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta" by day and by night.



Stūpa and museum for Luang Pū Lā Khemapatto, Wat Phū Cõ Kõ

Afterword

What I forgot to write about[329]

During the Luang Pū Mun and Bān Nõng Phue period, there was no need to worry too much if guests came from far away in regard to food, drink, rest and sleep, for the following reason: at that time, there were hardly any thieves or other criminals. Everything was very practical. But nowadays, one has to take care of everything as best one can to ensure safety and well-being in all areas, because the situation is critical in both the city and the countryside.

And on Vesākha, *Māgha** and Sāth,[330] which are important days for Buddhists, Luang Pū Mun instructed the Buddhists in the community in the practice, as was customary.

The daily morning and evening recitation was conducted by each person quietly on their own. The voice was not used to bother others. It was up to each person to determine whether to recite a lot or a little. Great importance was placed on walking and sitting meditation (this was the "Great Recitation"). If one contemplated the three characteristics, whether by day or night, it was said that one was reciting the "Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta" by day and by night. For example. But on Māgha and Vesākha days, everyone had to recite together, including lay people. At the beginning and end of the rains retreat and on Uposatha days the novices joined [the monks] in the recitation programme and then in the determination of the place of residence for the rains retreat.[331] During the rains retreat everyone recited on their own, except on Uposatha days.

When the monks and novices experienced conflicts in their meditation or had urgent concerns, for example, if they were newly and acutely ill, the master would always provide them with a special opportunity to report to him in accordance with the circumstances.

If someone wishes to raise objections to the Dhamma at the high level, as represented by Master Luang Pū Mun ("Dhamma, no matter what aspect: if you conceive yourself as partaking, then it is already completely wrong."), they might say the following: "In the *Paṭhamasambodhi* and in the *Buddhahistory*, it is said that when the Blessed One was fully awakened to full and perfect awakening, he stayed partaking in the happiness of liberation for seven days in each place, for 49 days in all, because Miss Sujātā had offered him food, namely Madhupāyasa[332] rice, a whole tray full of it, which he divided into 49 bites, so probably one bite per day." But they get stuck on to the words "partaking in the happiness of liberation". To relieve Luang Pū Mun of his work, I say this: perhaps the Keci-Ācāns[333] used conventional language to convey a certain meaning to their listeners, namely that the Blessed One was partaking in the happiness of liberation. These words "partaking in the happiness of liberation" actually come from the blessed mouth of the Blessed One.[334] But it may well be that the Keci-Ācāns used conventional language to help their listeners understand.

I understand it this way: wherever the Blessed One thought to dwell, in whatever manner, this we cannot know, because with regard to the taste of the heart and the Dhamma of the Blessed One, there was no possibility for the followers to know every aspect and every angle. For example, the Venerable Anuruddha was able to follow the Blessed One's path to the cessation of perception and feeling,[335] so at times he was able to follow him. But it was of course impossible for him to put himself in the place of the Blessed One. If this were not so, then all followers could have considered themselves equal to the Blessed One. For example, the fact that the Venerable Mahā-Sāriputta was praised for his great wisdom is irrelevant because it was probably not even a quarter [of the wisdom] of the Blessed One. Even if the Venerable Sivalī gained much, it was probably not even a quarter [of the gain] of the Blessed One.

Another aspect to consider: Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā was able to enter the cessation of perception and feeling. The householder Visākha asked her whether, upon entering the cessation of perception and feeling, she knew where she was or not. She replied that one does not think that one is in the cessation of perception and

feeling, nor does one think that one is outside of it, or anything else. All this as an example. And this is in accordance with the words of Luang Pū Mun: "Dhamma, no matter what aspect: if you conceive yourself as partaking, then it is already completely wrong." This is Dhamma at a high level of the Buddha's teaching. If one is eager to surpass Luang Pū Mun in his Dhamma talk, one should first contemplate what has been said here, both thoroughly and comprehensively.

Death of the father

I sincerely apologise to my honoured readers [for an omission] regarding my paternal ancestry. My father died three years before my mother. He was was over 80 years old and suffering from old age. When night fell on that day, he was not agitated. All his descendants were gathered around his sickbed. He gave all kinds of instructions: "I don't want my children to quarrel. Please leave me alone tonight. Give me something to drink. Be quiet. I want to meditate lying down." Then, in the evening, he made a prediction: "Tomorrow morning at the golden hour of dawn, I will die." That means, he said this the evening before because in his inner being he already knew it: "It is quite normal for old people, when phlegm rises and sticks in their throats and they no longer have the strength to cough it up, that they must then die, my dear children." From then on, I was the head of the family. It was not yet time for me to be ordained. I still had a family. That night, my father lay down on his right side. By the time morning came around he hadn't moved a muscle. When the predicted time came, he passed away very quietly. There was no twitching of the body, not even a little. His relatives who were watching didn't notice anything. It was as if he were asleep. When Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī heard about it, he said that it was truly amazing.

It should be noted that I was the last child. I never saw my father drink alcohol. I never saw any animal traps in his hands, neither for animals on land nor in the water. But he wasn't wealthy, and he didn't want to be in debt to anyone. Rich people in the countryside at that time had 100,000 baht. According to hearsay, they

were the richest people at that time. But my father only had 100 baht. Yet he loved to give above all else. People with 100,000 baht donated 5 baht. My father, who had problems to contend with, also gave 5 baht as a donation. If in my father's family nothing was put in the bowl [for the monks] on a particular day, there would be trouble.

Legacy to children and grandchildren

A monastery must remain a monastery. Don't turn it into a lottery station where people come to pick up their lottery numbers. That would be like giving the monks a clout on the head or smearing the monastery with excrement. That is a way of thinking that tramples on the Buddha's teaching and destroys it, and denigrates the practice in the samnak. And all of this has one and the same meaning.

Leading others into vices and thus intoxicating them with those vices has one and the same meaning in the Buddha's teaching as building the Great Mahā-Aveci Hell. Vices of all kinds and the destruction of the world also have the same meaning. Misfortune for humans, celestial beings, brahmas, and [for the path] to Nibbāna also have the same meaning. Recommending vices and seducing others into stripping the thread in a way that they leave the realm of the Buddha's teaching also has the same meaning.

That someone who does not see the harm in vices could truly arrive at the three characteristics is not possible. Even if a starless sky were free of clouds and fog, one still could not see any stars. How then could one see the moon and sun? Someone who does not arrive at the three characteristics is just the same. Oh, dear impermanence!

Some who read this develop angry thoughts. They carry their anger with them and want to sell it to Nibbāna. But this world is already full of anger. It cannot be sold. Nibbāna cannot be found in these things. There is no need to waste a single word on this.

Luang Phõ, Luang Tā, Luang Pū Lā Khemapatto means well. May there be no enmity!

What remains for us?

Through the shine of the Buddha's teaching,
is that which remains,
good beyond measure,
and always on hand.
Nothing owed to the one who knows,
not ignorance.
Nothing owed to one who believes,
not unbelief.
Beyond the world,
forever, constantly, continually, always!
Precisely then:
deeply passionate
about escaping the round of suffering,
we will all thus
truly know, practise, escape.
In the heart of the now,
in the truth of the now,
because nothing remains,
forever.

Supplementary texts by Mettiko Bhikkhu

Luang Pū's last breath

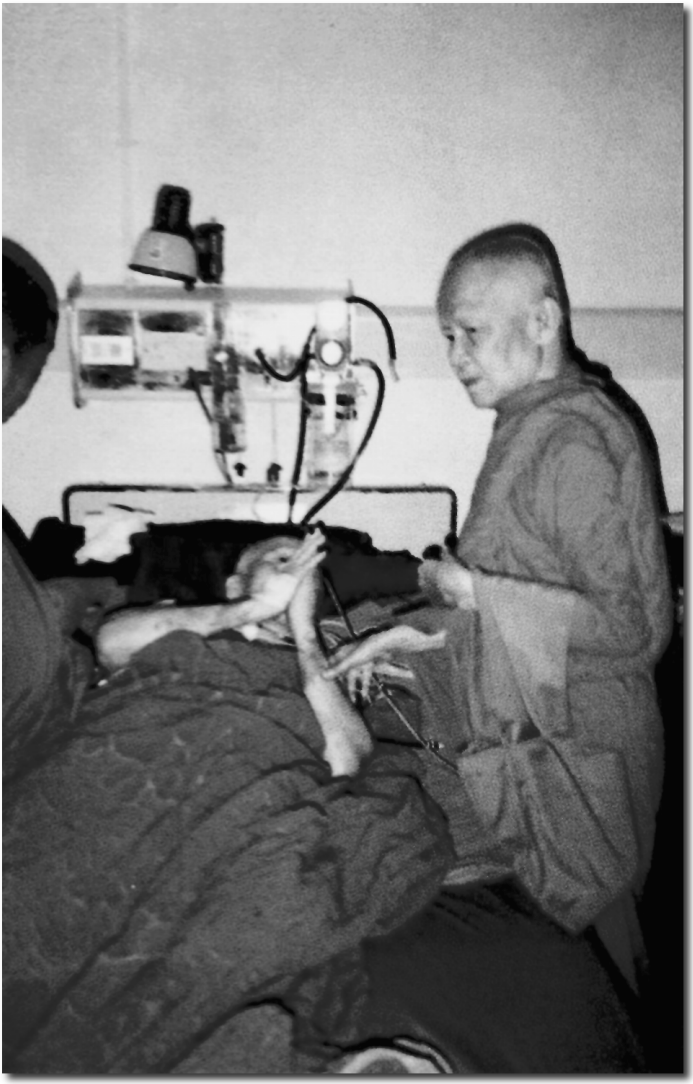
The information available about Luang Pū Lā's final days is sparse and partly contradictory. Some sources mention intestinal disease as the cause of death, others a cold that "went down his throat". A critical comparison of the texts yields the following picture:

In December 1995, complications arose with the hernia. It is possible that his intestine was trapped. Luang Pū was taken to hospital against his will by his followers and underwent emergency surgery. His old master, Luang Pū Mahā, visited him in hospital. Luang Pū Lā asked Luang Pū Mahā Bua for forgiveness for his failure to the Khrū Bā Ācān tradition – by which he meant his hospitalisation. Luang Pū Mahā Bua granted this and gave him permission to lay down his body.

In the post-operative stage, a series of complications arose due to Luang Pū's poor general condition. He had probably contracted pneumonia. When it became clear that he would not recover, he was brought back to Wat Phū Cõ Kõ.

On 19 January 1996, Venerable Mahā Bua was informed by the doctors that there was no prospect of recovery. Luang Pū Mahā recommended that futile life-prolonging measures be discontinued. On the same day, at 1:59 pm, Venerable Lā Khemapatto entered parinibbāna without remainder.

Nine days later, on 28 January 1996, the cremation of the body took place at Wat Phū Cõ Kõ, presided over by Luang Pū Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno. Shortly afterwards, the bone remains transformed into relics, which can be seen together with Luang Pū Lā's requisites in the walk-in cedī/museum that was later built.



Luang Pū Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno visiting Luang Pū Lā

Luang Pū Śrī Mahāvīro performing ritual ablution of the corpse

Carrying loads

The way of carrying loads is a recurring topic in Luang Pū Lā's book. One reason for this is that there is a certain way of carrying loads that according to the Vinaya is not permitted for monks because it is not considered appropriate for them. The Thai language has specific words for each of the different ways of carrying.

Hām (หาม): load is carried by two people using a carrying pole.

Hiu (หิ้ว): A load is carried hanging from the hand.

Hõb (หอบ): A load is carried with both hands in front of the chest.

Baehk (แบก): A load is carried on the shoulder or in a piggyback position.

Hāb (หาบ): Two loads are carried by one person with the aid of a carrying pole on the shoulder. This method ("like a coolie") is not permitted for monks. See Cullavagga V.30.

Khõn (คอน): A load is carried by one person at one end of a carrying pole.

Caption for this photo from 1975:

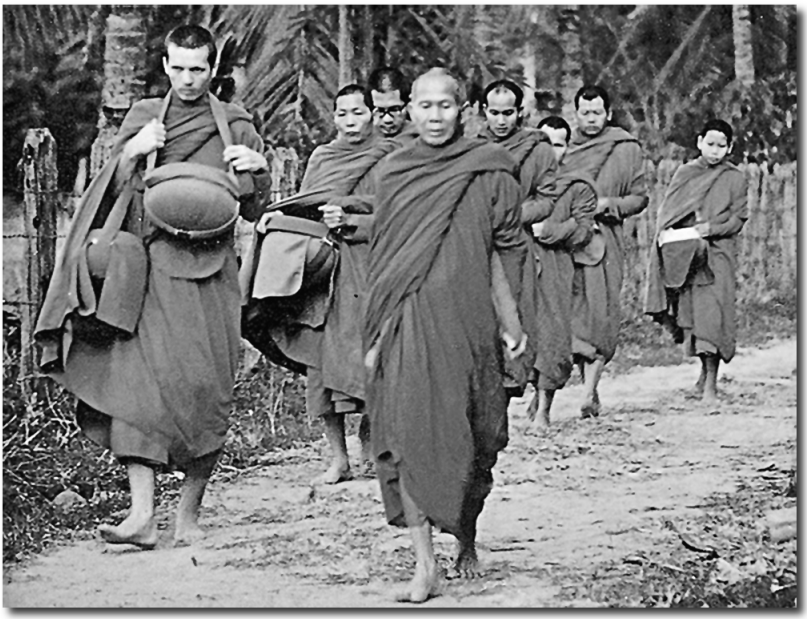
"Luang Pū was kind enough to demonstrate how water was khõned up the mountain [at that time] because the saṅgha was not allowed to hāb water. (Please note the carrying pole used by the Venerable One for khõning.)"

Or, as a monks' proverb puts it:

"Hām mai hām, hāb hām."

(Hāming is not forbidden, hābing is forbidden.)"

Saphāy (สะพาย): A load is carried using a sling.



And then there is thue, um, kõd, yok, etc., but that would be going too far.

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Glossary

Thai words are marked with a 'T'. Terms from the Pāli language are written in lower case here, except for names and titles.

abhidhamma piṭaka: third division of the Pāli Canon, scholasticism

*Ācān (*also *ajaan, ajahn):* T: teacher; form of address, designation, personal pronoun

ācariya: teacher; in a specific context: the mentor of a newly ordained bhikkhu during the first five years, see *nissaya*

āgantuka: newcomer, visitor; a term for a monk who does not belong to the resident monastic community and in some cases is not allowed to participate in the communal recitation of the *pāṭimokkha*

akāliko: timeless

anāgāmī: non-returner; one who has reached the third stage of awakening and, before liberation, will only be reborn in an ethereal pure realm

anāgārika: a "houseless one", candidate for ordination

ānāpānassati: mindfulness of breathing

anattā: not-self

anicca: impermanent, unstable

anicca-dukkha-anattā: impermanent, suffering, not-self; the *three characteristics*

añjali: gesture of respect with the hands folded in front of the chest or forehead

anumodanā: is often referred to as a "blessing before a meal," but is actually an expression of appreciation, approval, and shared joy.

anuvāta: a cut border that doubles up the edge of a robe

apāyamukha: literally "face of decline/facing decline"; gateway to the lower realm of existence, hell; drain (of goodness); in Thai, it is a collective term for various vices: fornication, drunkenness, gambling, associating with bad company (see Aṅguttara Nikāya 8.54).

appanāsamādhi: full concentration

arahant: one who has lived the holy life, who has destroyed the *āsavas**; "one who has finished"; one who is completely free from suffering, who has attained *nibbāna*, the Deathless

āsava: outflows, effluents, influxes, taints, drives, cankers

Asubha (practice): (contemplation of) the unattractiveness of the body

atirekalābho: gain beyond the usual, a bonus

avijjā: ignorance, false knowledge

(baddha)sīmā: a defined area in which decisions of the saṅgha are made, where, for example, ordinations can take place

bān: T: village, house

bhāvanā: development, meditation

bhavaṅga: factor of becoming; commentarial scholastic term; T: (depending on the Khrū Bā Ācān, a synonym for) full concentration *or* trance *or* deep sleep

bhikkhu: fully ordained monk in the Buddhist order

bodhisatta: beings on the path to Buddhahood

brahmā: celestial being, god

brahmavihāra: divine abodes, see *immeasurables*

Buddho: Buddha, the Awakened One; the word "Buddho" (in the nominative case) is recited inwardly continuously like a mantra

cāga: generosity, letting go

Cao Khuṇ: T: title, something like "(His) Eminence"

cedī: T: dome-monument, stūpa

citta: heart, mind; sometimes also in the sense of a liberated heart

cittaviveka: seclusion of the heart, freedom from hindrances, a heart in concentration

dāna: giving

deva: angel, fairy, elf, deity

desanā: Dhamma discourse, usually with a specific formal structure

dhamma: 1. teaching; the teachings of the Buddha; 2. natural law; 3. truth; highest reality; 4. the supramundane; 5. righteousness, virtue, morality; 6. tradition, practice, rule; 7. justice; 8. thing, phenomenon; 9. mental object, idea; 10. state of mind, character

dhammakkhandha: group of teachings; in a specific context: the 5 khandhas free from grasping

Dhammavinaya: the teachings and monastic discipline proclaimed by the Buddha; together they make up the Buddha's guidance

Dhammayut(tika): "according to the Dhamma"; name of an ordination body in Thailand

dhātu: element, nature, type, property; that which carries itself as a sign; sphere

dhutaṅga: limb or practice of shaking off; 13 ascetic practices: 1. wearing robes made of discarded cloth; 2. limiting oneself to one set of robes; 3. eating food obtained on alms round; 4. systematic (not prearranged alms) walking; 5. only one meal per day; 6. eating only from the bowl; 7. not accepting later food (not putting more into the bowl than one can eat *or* not accepting food that is brought to the monastery after the alms round); 8. living in the forest; 9. living without a hut under a tree; 10. living in the open air; 11. living on a charnel ground; 12. being content with any accommodation; 13. sitting at all times (not lying down)

dukkaṭa: literally "badly done"; a category of minor offences in the monastic discipline observed by bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs

dukkha: 1. that which is unsatisfactory, imperfect, suffering; 2. pain

ekāsanikaṅga: "Practice of sitting down only once (at mealtimes)," one of the 13 *dhutaṅga*-practices

fāk: T: split bamboo, a cheap building material (see cover photo)

formations: conditions that are not recognized as such; that which shapes the place and role of the experiencer; accessories of existence

immeasurables (four): the immeasurable mental states (*appamaññā*) – the practice of boundless goodwill (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*); also known as the four *brahmavihāras**

Īsān: T: name for North-East Thailand

jhāna: a deepening of meditation, state of consistent concentration

kamma, kammic: action, and in relation to its results

kammaṭṭhāna: place of work, specifically: meditation practice

kaṭhina: a wooden frame for sewing robes; in a broader sense, a festival celebrating the donation of robe-cloth after the end of the rains retreat

karuṇā: compassion

kāyaviveka: physical seclusion, dwelling in an isolated place

khaṇḍa: piece, technical term from the Vinaya for sewing robes; a robe that complies with the rules does not consist of one large piece of cloth, but rather of several khaṇḍas

khandha: heap, group; specifically: aspect of existence / experience

khaṇikasamādhi: temporary concentration

khõ wat: T: practice, rule, monastic form/etiquette

Khrū Bā: T: form of address, such as "Reverend", "Teacher"

Khrū Bā Ācān (also *Khrūbācān*, *Khrū Ācān* or *Khrūcān*): T: Great Master, fully realized teacher

kiccavatta: rules of conduct, duties of courtesy, etiquette (part of the Vinaya)

kilesa: stain, defilement of the mind; greed; hatred and delusion and their effect on the mind

klod: T: a large umbrella with a mosquito net hung over it, which is then suspended from a branch, for example (see photo on page 276)

kratõp, krathõm, kranam: T: a simple hut with no proper windows or doors, sometimes with no (or less than four) walls

kuṭi: monk's hut

Luang Phõ: T: form of address "Venerable Father"

Luang Pū: T: form of address "Venerable Grandfather" – paternal

Luang Tā: T: form of address "Venerable Grandfather" – maternal

Mae Chī: T: a nun with eight ethical precepts who lives a more or less monastic life but does not actually belong to the ordained saṅgha

Mae Õk/Phõ Õk: T: female/male lay followers, who spend a lot of time in a monastery

Māgha pūjā: full moon in February/March; festival commemorating the gathering of 1,250 arahants during the time of the Buddha

Mahā: the Great; title for Pāli scholars in Thailand

Māra: the tempter: 1. a malevolent celestial being; 2. the inner devil (*kilesamāra*); 3. the challenge of having to lug around a gross material body (*khandhamāra*); 4. death; 5. the problem of existence in general

mettā: all-encompassing unconditional love, universal goodness, goodwill

name-and-form: form is that which triggers experience; name is that which shows itself in experience; together they make up the content of experience (that which one is conscious of). Consciousness is the presence of name-and-form.

Navakovāda: a kind of catechism for newly ordained bhikkhus

nibbāna: extinction (of greed, hatred and delusion); the highest goal in the Buddha's teaching; the end of ignorance; the unconditioned, deathless, unformed

niccaṁ: permanent

nikāya: body, group, collection; specifically: ordination body

nimitta: sign, vision, characteristic

nirodha: cessation (of craving, and thus, of *dukkha*, suffering)

nissaya: the dependency of a new bhikkhu on a mentor

noble ones: beings who have entered the path leading to Nibbāna or have taken it to its end

opanayiko: leading inward, leading across

paccattaṁ: personally, for oneself

paccekabuddha: one who awakens independently (without guidance from the Buddhadhamma) but who cannot pass on his supra-mundane realisation; in contrast, a sammāsambuddha is able to give the teaching to the world once again.

paṁsukūla: waste, without an owner; nowadays a form of cloth donation, often in connection with funerals

paññā: wisdom, insight, ability to understand according to reality

pārami: perfection, spiritual virtue; T: skill in worldly and spiritual matters

parikamma: literally: preparation; often used in the sense of mental recitation, repetition of a meditation word; sometimes in the sense of meditation object or meditation method.

pavāraṇā: invitation (specifically: to admonish one another, or to ask for requisites)

paṭiccasamuppāda: dependent co-arising; the structure of experience in worldly beings, conditioned by ignorance; origin of suffering

pāṭimokkha: code of rules for bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs

peta, preta: hungry ghost, spectre; being in a realm of existence characterised by unfulfilled greed

phra dhātu: T: relic (Thai pronunciation: phra thāt)

Phra Khrū: T: a lower monk rank, "Venerable Teacher"

piṇḍapāta: alms round (T: *biṇṭabāt*)

pīti: rapture; feeling of well-being due to inspiration or concentration

pūjā: act of worship, devotion

puthujjana: ordinary person, worldling, who has not yet seen the Dhamma and has not yet entered the path

rains retreat (Pāli: *vassāvāsa* or short *vassa*; T: *phansā*): three of the four months of the rainy season according to the Indian calendar, during which monks must remain in one location and are not allowed to travel; usually from the full moon in July to the full moon in October

sabong: T: a piece of cloth corresponding in style and size to a monk's lower robe

saddhā: confidence, faith

saddhivihārika: attendant monk

sādhu: good, great, excellent; an expression of approval and appreciation

sālā: hall; it can even be just a roof on pillars without walls

samādhi: 1. concentration, a collected mind state; 2. training the mind (development of mindfulness, effort, and concentration)

samaṇa: spiritual seeker who is outside of the class/caste system

sāmaṇera: "little sāmaṇa", novice

samatha: tranquillity of mind

sammāñāṇa: right knowledge

samnak: T: centre, specifically: small forest monastery, which is not authorised as a place for ordinations under Thai law

saṁsāra: the wandering from one existence to another

sandiṭṭhiko: to be seen here and now

saṅgha: 1. the noble ones; 2. the order of Buddhist monks and nuns

Saṅgharāja: Head of the Order; this office is a modern invention

saṅghāṭi: outer robe, the double-layered "winter robe"

saṅkhāra: that which forms, formation, determination, fabrication; special application: volition, body

sati: recollection, memory, mindfulness

sīla: 1. virtue, custom, morality; 2. ethical precept; 3. part of the threefold path of practice; 4. habit

sīla-samādhi-paññā: the threefold path of practice: ethics, training the mind, wisdom

Somdet: T: title "(His) Holiness"

sotāpanna: stream-enterer; one who has reached the first stage of awakening through seeing the Dhamma, and who will be reborn no more than seven times before liberation, and cannot sink into the lower realms of being

sutta: scriptural discourse

taṇhā: craving, thirst; origin of suffering

tham bun: T: literally "meritorious action"; it usually refers to giving donations as a spiritual practice

Than: T: form of address "Esteemed Sir", often used in conjunction with other forms of address, also used among lay people

Than Phõ: T: form of address "Esteemed Father"

Thera: monastic elder with more than 10 rains; also used as a title

three characteristics: anicca, dukkha, anattā (a commentarial term not to be found in the suttas)

three spheres of existence: the three worlds of sensuality, form and formlessness

threefold world spheres: see *"three spheres of existence"*

thudong: T: ascetic lifestyle, especially journeying on foot, retreating to remote places (from *dhutaṅga*)

upacārasamādhi: neighbourhood concentration, access concentration

upādāna: attachment, grasping, clinging, taking-up

upadhiviveka: seclusion from all acquisitions; *nibbāna*

upajjhāya: ordination giver, ordination father, preceptor

upasampadā: full ordination as a bhikkhu

upāsikā: female lay follower; Luang Pū Mun and Luang Pū Lā used the word for eight-precept nuns (*Mae Chīs*).

upāya: skilful means (for the practice), approach; in a special sense: reprimand.

uposatha: moon day (full moon, new moon, half moon); day of heightened efforts in the practice; on full moon and new moon days, bhikkhus recite the 227 *pāṭimokkha* rules

Vesākha Pūjā: full moon in May; festival commemorating the birth, awakening and parinibbāna of the Buddha

vinaya: guidance; monastic discipline

vipassanā: insight

viriya: energy, drive

Visuddhimagga: "Path of Purification"; commentary, written around AD 500 in Sri Lanka

wat: T: fully established monastery; also colloquially used for a *samnak*

yojana: a yojana is a unit of length measurement, somewhere between 7 and 24 kilometres

If one thinks one has the responsibility to go outwards and only teach other people, then one lacks mettā for oneself. If one lacks mettā for oneself, how should one be able to have mettā for others?

Pāli pronunciation and transliteration of Thai words

Pāli and Sanskrit words

(adapted from a Pāli pronunciation guide used by Amaravati Publ.)

The spelling used in this book for Pāli words follows the official system of Roman lettering. Pronunciation is generally as one would expect, but a few sounds require clarification.

Vowels are of three types:

1. Short vowels

a as in ***a****bout*, (*tr****u****ck*)

i as in *h****i****t*

u as in *p****u****t*

2. Long vowels

ā as in *f****a****ther*

ī as in *mach****i****ne*

ū as in *r****u****le*

3. Long or short vowels

These vowels are long except in syllables ending in a consonant.

e as in *gr****e****y* / short as in *g****e****t*

o as in *m****o****re* / short as in ***o****x*.

Consonants are pronounced mostly as one would expect, with some additional rules:

Aspirated consonants

bh, ch, dh, ḍh, gh, jh, kh, ph, th, ṭh count as one single consonant.

These two-lettered notations with *h* denote aspirated sounds, which are pronounced like the single consonant followed by a slight puff of air. They differ from the crisp sound of the single, non-aspirated, consonant. (Latin script does not have enough letters to write all Pāli consonants. However, the other combinations with *h*, i.e. *lh, mh, ñh* and *vh* do count as two consonants.)

Examples:

kh as in ***c**osmetic*, and *k* as in *nic**k**el*

ph as in ***p**ine*, and *p* as in *ap**p**le*

th as in ***t**arget*, and *t* as in *ca**t***

(note the puff of air after the aspirated, but not the unaspirated consonant)

Retroflex consonants

ḍ, ḍh, ḷ, ṇ, ṭ, ṭh

These letters have no English equivalent. They are pronounced by curling the tip of the tongue against the palate.

Nasal consonants absent in English

ṁ, ṅ as *ng* in *sa**ng***

ñ as *ny* in *ca**ny**on*

Consonants pronounced differently in Pāli than in English

c as in ***ch**ildren*, but unaspirated; as in ***j**ar*, but voiceless (the sound does not have an exact English equivalent)

ph is never pronounced as in English *photo*, but as in *pine*.

th is never pronounced as in English *the*, but as in *target*.

Thai words

Thai words were transliterated using a similar system to the one used in Thailand for traffic signs. Where the Thai spelling differs from its pronunciation, either a compromise was made between the two, or the option most accessible to English readers was chosen. For example, the Sanskrit word *ācārya* (teacher) is spelt *ācāry* in Thai, but pronounced *ācān*. We used *ācān* here, instead of the more common transliterations *ajaan* or *ajahn*.

Consonants are used as in Pāli, with the exception of the sound for *ṁ/ṅ* in Pāli, which is spelt *ng* here because it can occur at the beginning of a Thai word – *ṁ* and *ṅ* can't (so it is *ngū* instead of *ṅū*). There is also the letter *w*, which does not exist in Pāli. Since the Thai language lacks retroflex consonants, Thai speakers may pronounce them in words borrowed from Pāli or Sanskrit like their regular, non-retroflex, counterparts. (The same holds true for other languages that lack retroflex consonants, such as English and German).

Vowels are used as in Pāli, with the same distinction between short and long vowels: *a/ā, i/ī, u/ū.*

Sometimes *h* is inserted after *e* and *o* to emphasise that a vowel is long.

Additionally, Thai has a few *vowels absent in English*:

ae [IPA[a]: *æ* / Thai แอ] as in *sh**a**mpoo* / *f**ai**r*

oe [IPA ɤ / Thai เอิ-] similar to *b**i**rd*, roughly between *o* and *e*

ue [IPA ɤ / Thai อือ] as in German *J**ue**rgen*, roughly between *i* and *u*

õ [IPA ɔ / Thai ออ] as in *s**aw***

The Thai language makes much use of ***diphthongs***, or sounds consisting of multiple merged vowels. Examples range from simple āi/ai (Thai -าย/ไ-), āo/ao (Thai -าว/เ-า), to complex ueay (Thai เ-ือย) and iao (Thai เ-ียว). Ai und ay are identical in sound and simply represent different word origins.

An exception to the spelling rules

There is one word that is already widespread in the literature. And because of this it has been written according to that existing convention, even if this differs from the system otherwise used in this book:

The name of Ven. Bhūridatto has been spelt *Mun* here, not *Man* [IPA: man / mʌn].

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a International Phonetic Alphabet

A final note on transliteration from Thai

It is generally difficult to decide whether a transliteration should preserve the spelling and etymological origin of a word, or its pronunciation, and the decisions made in this book were not always consistent. For example, the word ธรรม could be spelt Dhamma, Thamma or Thamm. In the end, it is rarely possible to preserve the exact Thai pronunciation after a word has been transliterated. (Not to mention the tones ...)

Notes

1 Terms in italics with an asterisk are explained in the glossary and are assumed to be familiar from this point onwards.

2 The chapter titles occasionally deviate in style and content from the actual text. They may have been inserted during the process of bringing the handwritten manuscript to print. Nevertheless they have been kept unchanged here.

3 The Venerable Inthawāy is Luang Pū Lā's most well-known student. Addressing a monk as "Khuṇ" is no longer customary today, but in Luang Pū Lā's old-school usage it was a normal form of address for younger monks.

4 "There is nothing hidden in this world." (Aṅguttara Nikāya 3. 40)

5 The world of sensuality, form and formlessness.

6 "Dhamm mau", *drunken, stupid Dhamma*, is an expression coined by Luang Pū Waen Suciṇṇo. His lectures were published in Thailand at the same time as Luang Pū Lā was writing his autobiography. But he had most likely never met the Venerable Waen in person.

7 Phra Ācān Inthawāy Santussako was born on 27 April 1945. In 1957 he became a novice and in 1965 a bhikkhu with Luang Pū Lā, and remained with him until 1966. Today he is the abbot of Wat Pā Nā Kham Nõi, Nā Yūng district, in Udõn province.

8 Luang Pū Lā's monastery, see the last sections of this book.

9 *Asaṅkheyya*: according to พจนานุกรมพุทธศาสน์ –ประมวลศัพท์ the "Dictionary of Buddhism" by P. A. Payutto, an Asaṅkheyya is a quarter Mahākappa (great eon, the time between the Big Bang and the Big Crunch); by current estimate, about 72 x 10^9 years, give or take.

10 *Thit* (an abbreviation of *Paṇḍit*) is a form of address in North-East Thailand for men who were ordained as monks for a period of time.

11 Craving for sensuality, for being and for potential being.

12 In Thai ผู้รู้ / Phū rū; a teaching term used by many Thai masters to describe the "one who knows", the "experiencer", as an object of identi-

fication even at the most subtle level.

13 *Yīsip* is Thai, *sāo* is Lao, both mean *twenty*.

14 Perhaps the reader has noticed by now that the last children in each of the cases are always called *Lā*. The name indeed indicates that this is the last child. But this does beg the question: How did the parents know this at the time of birth?

15 One rai measures 1600 m^2, about a sixth of a hectare.

16 Robes, alms food, shelter and medicine.

17 *Khorāt* is the abbreviated name of *Nakhõn Rāchasīmā*.

18 *Mahānikāya* is the monastic order to which most monks in Thailand belong.

Presumably, "Mūla" is the colloquial abbreviation of "Mūla-kacchaya", an old curricula and study compendium that was replaced by a nationally standardised course of study to become a "Dhamma expert" (Nak Thamm) at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Thai มูลเดิม is ambiguous, it could mean "the ancient Mūla" or "the original foundations" or "old dung".

Palm leaf *desanas** are still popular in the countryside today.

19 King Vajiravudh, born in 1880, ruled until his death on 19. 11. 1925. He was the sixth king of the Cakri dynasty.

20 Cittasaṅkhārā: perception and feeling

21 That is to say, she hadn't attended school and could neither read nor write.

22 A Sanām Luang is a large public space, like for example the Sanām Luang in Bangkok, where royal ceremonies take place. Luang Pū Lā presumably means here the "schoolyard" in the monastery of a Saṅgha regional office, where exams are held annually.

23 Rice "sticking" is the transplanting of small rice plants that have been preplanted in a smaller paddy field. Another option is to sow rice over a wide area, which is less work but not as productive.

24 This probably happened in the afternoon.

25 That is, he only went on alms round for as long as it took to get more or less just enough to eat.

26 "Salty" in Thai describes, as a figure of speech, several different character traits, both good and bad: greedy, stingy, shabby, but also tolerant, stoic, careful, self-controlled, composed. Here it probably refers to the aspect of self-control.

27 Often written "Mekong".

28 One Thai rope length (เส้น, sen) is equal to 40 meters, similar to a mountaineering rope length in the West.

29 Even in the original text it is not clear *who* made the gesture – the tiger or the monk.

30 "To leave the training" means to leave the monkhood, to disrobe.

31 The Vulture Peak is located near Rajgir in India.

32 However, in the case of a novice ordination, pabbajja, no upajjhāya is required.

33 The term "rains retreats" denotes ordination years.

34 A teaching text for new bhikkhus, basic teaching categories, a kind of catechism.

35 Colloquial abbreviations for the above suttas. Learning Mahāsamay from the Dīgha Nikāya by heart is quite an accomplishment because it is mostly a list of names, with little content or narrative.

36 In Thailand, compulsory military service is determined on a percentage basis, i.e. only a portion of the men who are fit for military service are drafted into the army. This percentage is determined by drawing lots. Luang Pū Lā is playing with the word ถูก (thūk) here, which can mean "right/correct" or "to be affected". The good thing that happened to him was to draw a lot that meant the he was not "affected" by having to become a soldier. Why he had nevertheless drawn a lot that was not "right" will become clear at the end of this chapter.

37 In Thailand, there are two monastic orders or Nikāyas. The Mahānikāya is the larger and more heterogeneous of the two. The Dhammayutnikāya has more forest/practice monks.

38 The anusāvanācariya and the kammavācācariya are the upajjhāya's assistants, so to speak, but they do most of the work.

39 Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī (Cūm Bandhulo), 1888-1962, was one of the first disciples of Luang Pū Sao Kantasīlo, and later of Luang Pū Mun. When he was still a novice, in the years 1902-1905, he got to know and appreciate the monastic way of the kammaṭṭhāna tradition. As a consequence he always felt connected with the forest monks and was their supporter within the saṅgha administration.

40 The Mahā title is continued even after a person has left the monkhood.

41 That was in 1940/41.

42 From this information, the following can be gathered: after the alms round, the food was handed in and redistributed to everyone. Thus, for example, novices, who usually received less at the end of the line on alms round, were not at a disadvantage. There is at least one austere forest monastery where even today it *is* a problem when the eyes are bigger than the stomach. There it is customary that if too much is left in the bowl, the monk concerned would confess this and be given the task of toilet cleaning as an object of contemplation.

43 The robe season comes in the first month after the rains retreat, which is also the fourth month of the rainy season. During this time, a few monastic rules are suspended in order to facilitate robe-making. When a Kaṭhina robe has been made, the robe season is extended by the four months of the cold season.

44 The play on words in Thai is: Mai mī antaray dai dai duay suea suea sā sā, mai hen mī mā.

45 Phra Ācān Brohm Cirapuññо (1888-1969) was a senior disciple of Luang Pū Mun.

46 A famous pilgrimage site on the banks of the Mae Khong River.

47 This probably concerned the washing of robes with a decoction made with heartwood shavings from the jackfruit tree.

48 Robes, alms food, shelter, medicine.

49 After receiving such an invitation, pavāraṇā, a monk may ask for things needed, otherwise not (exception: one's own relatives). It is valid for four months if not otherwise specified.

50 Olive-like tree fruit with a pit which grows everywhere in Thailand. The astringent taste becomes more palatable with salt and chilli.

51 The *teng* tree (ต้นเต็ง) and the *rang* tree (ต้นรัง) are large, shady trees from the Dipterocarpaceae family that are very common in Southeast Asia.

52 In banana leaves.

53 "Right down to chilli and ginger": an idiomatic expression meaning "wholeheartedly". But in this case it even applies in a literal sense.

54 Phra Ācān Sīlā Issaro was born on 5 December 1886, received upasampadā in 1909, was re-ordained Dhammayut in 1926. He died on 2 June 1967.

55 Requisites that mustn't get wet are kept in the bowl while travelling.

56 The monk's identity document (Bai Suddhi) is proof of belonging to a monastic order, especially the ordination lineage (in this case: Dhammayut). Than Ācān was already sure that he was dealing with a "real" one because of his guest's impeccable behaviour.

57 Phra Ācān Sīlā implicitly offered him a pair of new sandals.

58 According to the Vinaya, corporal punishment is not allowed. Perhaps this was meant metaphorically or to express a sense of exuberance.

59 A play on words: the word "mun" (มั่น) means stable, certain, reliable.

60 A place rich in history for the forest tradition. In the year 1926 several distinguished monks from the Sām Phong area became disciples of Luang Pū Mun, among them Phra Ācān Sīlā Issaro.

61 The study of Pāli has nine degrees. After completing the third degree, one is given the title "Mahā".

62 *Rõd* is a common name. It means "the survivor". Presumably the author had a subtle play on words in mind because the sentence could also be read in this way: "Luang Phõ was the only survivor ..." An allusion to the horror story?

63 *Nehn* is the abbreviation of *sāmaṇera* (novice). It is a term of address and at the same time the "name" of all nehns in Thailand.

64 It is possible that this was Than Ācān Un Uttamo, who later lived in Wat Udomratanārām, Sakon Nakhõn. (Luang Pū Mun had several dis-

ciples with the name Un.)

65 This is less common in Dhammayut circles.

66 See Jīvaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 55. Eating raw meat, human flesh, flesh of tigers, dogs, bears, horses, snakes and so on is against the Vinaya.

67 The word เงื่อน (nguean) hast two meanings: 1.) "knot" and 2.) "condition, clause, injunction".

68 *Kāye* means "Kāyena vācāya va cetasā vā ...". This is the request for forgiveness towards the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, as part of the evening pūjā.

69 Confessing offences usually takes place before the uposatha is held – either before a pāṭimokkha recitation, if four or more bhikkhus are present, or before the "proclamation of purity", if only two or three bhikkhus come together. The vast majority of rule offences are resolved by a confession (exception: serious offences) and thus the purity of being part of the ordination lineage (and at the same time the connection to the Buddha) is restored. Phra Ācān Un showed exemplary behaviour here. It was not an Uposatha day, Venerable Lā's confession was out of line, so to speak. Even if he hadn't been aware of any offences, he could state a blanket confession to transgressions of the rules that might have escaped his notice, as a mark of decency.

70 Annam was then the name of what is today, Vietnam.

71 Normally the klod is hung high enough so that you don't bump your head on it. In a cave it is sometimes difficult to fix the freely hanging klod high enough.

72 Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 61).

73 A loose translation of นาฬิกานาฬิแก (nāḷikā, nāḷikae); an invented expression, a rather ironic term for clocks.

74 This means: old conditioning, memories etc. can and must be faced in seclusion where distractions are few and far between. They then become palatable wholesome states so to speak. This passage doesn't refer to the alms food received – this was fresh every day!

75 "Eye" (ตา) in this context means *bud.* A *one-eyed coconut* is also a metaphor for something absurd. Coconuts bud in clusters.

76 That means: ready for action!

77 Phī Am have a habit of sitting on the chest of sleeping people at night (sleep apnoea?) or pulling the legs of thudong monks who lie down during the day. Or the scrotum. For example.

78 According to the Vinaya, a bhikkhu is subject to certain restrictions if he teaches Dhamma to women who aren't accompanied by a male – for good reasons. These reasons are no longer valid if another man is present who is able to judge whether it is really about Dhamma or whether there are other motives at play. (Pācittiya 7).

79 Banana leaves were and still are a packaging material for food in Thailand. A banana leaf by itself lacks content, but it is useful in and of itself.

80 This is an excerpt from the text on the five daily recollections: "Everything that is dear and pleasing to me will become otherwise, will become separated from me."

81 Phra Ācān Kū Dhammadinno, born 1900, Upasampadā 1920, re-ordained 1923, died 23 January 1953. He was one of the first disciples of Luang Pū Mun.

82 "More than more than" (กว่า ๆ) is less precise than "more than". While on thudong a western monk once was told that it was more than more than one hour to the destination. It was seven. Luang Pū Lā took about the same time for more than more than fourteen kilometres.

83 Actually: "A man anchored in the noble Dhamma." (Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.61 and 5.41)

84 *"Saṅgaho asaṅgaho"* is the beginning of a text from the third book of the Abhidhamma, Dhātukathā, which is recited on the occasion of death. The text is, however, an extreme example of branching out.

85 ผ้ารองก้นบาตร (phā rõng kon bāt); the expression is no longer used by monks today. It probably referred to a piece of cloth for placing the bowl on the floor. Placing the bowl on the floor in this way was necessary when the floor was made of split bamboo, to prevent the bowl from accidentally jumping out of the bowl stand (compare with page 103). An alms bowl mustn't be placed on a hard surface, such as the floor, without any protection (Cullavagga VIII.1.5). Another interpretation: it is an old expression for the bowl stand cover.

86 Luang Tā Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno, born 12 August 1913, Upasampadā 12 May 1934, laid down his body on 30 January 2011. He was the most influential disciple of Luang Pū Mun from the last generation.

87 Luang Pū Wan Uttamo, born 13 August 1922, novice with Luang Pū Sao Kantasīlo at the age of 15, Upasampadā on 29 January 1942, died in a plane crash on 23 April 1980. He was Luang Phõ Thõngdaeng Varapañño's first teacher.

88 Luang Tā Thõngkham, born 15 April 1923, was already a novice with Luang Pū Mun from 1943. He received Upasampadā as Bhikkhu Ñāṇobhāso in 1945. He disrobed around 1965 and re-entered the monastic order in 1993 as Bhikkhu Cāruvaṇṇo. He died in 2005.

89 He is referring to the forest tradition of the modern era, which began with Luang Pū Sao Kantasīlo.

90 Cullamaṅgalacakkavāḷa.

91 Jayamaṅgala-aṭṭhagāthā.

92 During these days after the rains retreat, many lay people presumably brought food to the monastery. Bhikkhus are not allowed to make añjali gestures to lay people. Sometimes it is understood that the food blessing is directed towards the lay people; in this case the hands are not placed together. Most monks understand it to mean that anumodana is expressed before the Buddha, hence they put their hands together. In Luang Pū Mun's eating sālā, there was no Buddha statue.

93 He probably means the Venerable Phan Pāresako, who was known for his uncompromising practice. Luang Pū Õn Ñāṇasiri gave him the nickname "horse". The term "sergeant" is an ironic expression for someone who wants to distinguish themselves through special commitment.

94 Those who waited on him after finishing the meal must have finished eating shortly before him. But even for the others, it wasn't appropriate to eat for much longer than the master.

95 The purpose of sharing the alms food was to ensure that all monastery residents were adequately provided for, regardless of their seniority. If food is short and the senior monks serve themselves first, there may only be rice left for the novices at the end of the line. The same applies to the alms round. The first monks in line usually get the best food.

The sharing can either take place as a communal activity or, if food is brought to the monastery, it can be done by one or more *bhatt-uddesaka* (food distributers).

Nowadays, most monasteries are well provided for and the dividing up only takes place in a few, very traditional monasteries (e.g., at Luang Pū Prīdā "Thui" Chandakaro, Wat Pā Dān Vivek). Alternatively in small samnaks "passing the food through in two rounds" sometimes takes place. The food is passed through for the monks to fill their bowls according to seniority, but in the first round, the monks at the head of the line hold back so that everyone gets enough. For the second round, everyone takes as they see fit.

In any case, the distribution of food is a good opportunity to resist one's defilements (greed for food) and to practice a friendly spirit of togetherness.

96 Presumably the width of the room, and not the hole.

97 The treasure belongs to someone else, but this treasure, this exemplary behaviour, was second nature to the owner, Luang Pū Mun. In contrast to this is the behaviour of imitators who hoped to gain advantage from it.

98 That is, he changed from sitting to walking meditation.

99 If the weather permits, the bowl should be placed in the sun for a short time, for both hygienic reasons and as a protection against rust (Cullavagga V.9.3).

100 *Upāya* – something with which, and on which, one can work, i.e., a reprimand. The "coarse and heavy" probably doesn't refer to the material used, but rather to the approach, such as a lack of care.

101 *Phap phiab*, the polite way of sitting with one leg tucked backwards.

102 Probably a standing figure of speech; it cannot be assumed that women were present for these nightly talks in the kuṭi.

103 ฟาก / Fāk, sheet of split bamboo, a symbol of wavering, uncertainty, unreliability, highly flammable, low value. The word also means "shore". Luang Pū Mun used images from the farming environment that were familiar to his audience. He also liked to use puns that are hard to reproduce in English.

104 Colloquial terms for "Pubbasikkhā-vaṇṇanā", a comprehensive Vinaya commentary from Thailand and for "Khandhakas of the Mahāvagga (and Cullavagga)", the thickest book of the Vinaya.

105 A commentarial term, which according to the *Visuddhimagga* means "sinking into the subconscious". It should be noted, however, that the Khrū Bā Ācāns used such terminology in their own particular way. In the case of Venerable Mun, it just meant khaṇikasamādhi; and samādhi is the opposite of "sinking into the subconscious".

106 Visuddhimagga: "arousal of the subconscious stream of existence through sense contact", also (the way the term is used in the commentary tradition) has nothing to do with samādhi.

107 This term is not found in the Visuddhimagga; its literal meaning is something like: "stopping the factors of becoming" (= "the subconscious").

108 Body, feeling, heart, dhammas; identification with them and their passing-away.

109 The first three are the contemplation of the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha; these three terms are also used as parikamma words of inner recitation. The last three are contemplation on ethics, giving/letting go and body contemplation.

110 In the 1920s and 1930s, there were conflicts with the saṅgha administration. Thudong monks who stayed in remote areas were treated with suspicion. The author himself had not personally experienced this conflict. In the 1960s, wandering in isolated mountain regions became problematic because communist insurgents were also present there. Luang Pū Lā may be alluding to this.

111 The wood contains a toxic sap that causes allergic reactions.

112 There is probably no actual person meant here. A monk of this name doesn't appear in Luang Pū Lā's circle. In the year 1918 or 1919, during his stay at the Bing Cave (Loei province) Luang Pū Mun had a disciple by the name of Bunthan Ṭhitapaññо, who came from Prācīnburī (central Thailand). He spent one month with the master and could be healed from a bout of self-overestimation. Luang Pū Lā most likely did not know him.

Bunthan (บุญทัน) means "merit at the right time". It is possibly a play on words: mindfulness of the breath is a meritorious action with immediate effect, or with effect at the right time.

113 He couldn't wash his robes frequently enough, which led to an unpleasant body odour.

114 This accompanying letter is an expression of exemplary practice. A monk who has not yet completed five rains retreats shouldn't roam the world alone in whatever way he sees fit, but rather should only move away from his mentor if his mentor approves. This point, like many others described in Luang Pū Lā's autobiography, is rarely observed nowadays.

115 The robes were dyed with a concentrated decoction of jackfruit heartwood. This dye is not colour fast when washing powder is used. For this reason, such robes are washed with a weaker decoction of jackfruit heartwood, which refreshes the colour at the same time. In this context, washing and dyeing are one and the same process.

116 Many Theravāda monks in warm countries have an aversion to the use of the saṅghāṭi. It has the unspoken aura of a "sacred object". In the thudong practice, it is inevitably returned to its original use as a robe for times of cold. In Luang Pū Lā's case, it sounds a little like he may have felt the need to justify himself.

117 The cloth was not donated directly at that time, but rather it was "thrown away" in order to be given to such monks who only wanted to use waste material, discarded cloth. The pieces of cloth were either placed in the forest, e.g., hung on branches, or deposited as a heap in the sālā or in another central place.

The etiquette involves the monk contemplating the cloth as "ownerless", verbalising the result of his contemplation, for example with the words "Imaṁ paṁsukūlacīvaraṁ assāmikaṁ mayhaṁ pāpuṇāti / This ownerless waste cloth has come to me", and then taking the cloth.

118 *Pacchābhatta*: this word, which has been incorporated into Thai, has various uses and meanings. Here, Luang Pū Lā means that he could observe the dhutaṅga practice of "dismissing (= not accepting) food given later, i.e., after the alms round" if no food was brought to where he was staying.

119 The image of the tree stump means: motionless, severed, meaningless.

120 Phra Ācān Fan Ācāro was born on 20 August 1899 in Bān Muang Khai, Sakon Nakhõn province into an aristocratic family. Ordained as a novice in 1918, as a bhikkhu (Mahānikāya) in 1919, as a bhikkhu (Dhammayut) in 1925; first generation disciple of Luang Pū Mun from 1921. He died on 4 January 1977 in Wat Pā Udomsomphõn, Sakon Nakhõn province.

121 Kakusandho was the first Buddha in this aeon. So his time is a little further back. See Dīgha Nikāya 32.

122 Many Thais believe that it is bad luck to lie with your head facing south. South (ใต้/tai) is associated with death (ตาย/tāi). In English, on the other hand, death is associated with the West. "To go west" is a colloquial expression for dying. Luang Pū Lā had no other choice, but survived the night anyway.

123 The folded outer robe, wrapped in a small cloth.

124 Wat Dõi Dhammacedī is one of the most important forest monasteries in Thailand. It was initiated by Luang Pū Kongmā Cirapuññ̌o and was under the leadership of Luang Phõ Baen Dhanakaro from 1962 to 2020. Luang Pū Mahā experienced his breakthrough to liberation there in 1950.

125 A walking path in an east-west direction is considered desirable in Thailand.

126 Presumably there were no mosquitoes due to the cold weather and the rocky environment.

127 That is, he sat at the foot of the plank bed.

128 It was certainly not the bathing cloth. An old rag for wiping and drying the feet is one of the most important items of equipment when wandering within the thudong practice. It is usually knotted around the foot of the bowl, which protrudes out of the bottom of the bowl bag, when on the move.

129 Seclusion from all acquisitions is synonymous with Nibbāna, the end of ignorance. At that time, Luang Pū Lā was probably not yet an arahant – at least this is what his later reactions to Luang Pū Mun's parinibbāna would suggest. However, it is quite possible that Luang Pū Lā

became a noble one, attaining stream entry, during his stay in the cave. The author certainly did not have any announcement of a superhuman state in mind in his autobiography, but rather made a mistake in the way he expressed it.

130 The monastic discipline allows bhikkhus to make an exception in the case of a snakebite by permitting them to dig in the earth to use it as medicine. Earth, urine, faeces and ashes do not have to be offered in such a case. See Mahāvagga VI.14.6.

131 The basic principle of preparing Khāo Lām: soaked sticky rice is roasted in bamboo tubes where the hard outer layer has been removed. When the rice is done, the tubes are cut into pieces. Before eating, the Khāo Lām pieces are peeled like a banana. There are very delicious versions where the rice is mixed with nuts, beans and coconut cream.

132 That is, a deep cave, as opposed to a grotto or rock overhang; the latter are also considered caves in Thailand.

133 Implicit here is that, on the basis of kammic causes, the wild animals haven't done him any harm so far. It is unlikely that this will change, because he is not sowing any new kammic causes of hostility.

134 This is a clear rejection of a scholastic model of explanation according to which our experience is composed of atomistic "mind moments" that appear and disappear like pearls strung together on a necklace. Luang Pū had come across these and other theories while studying at the beginning of his monastic life and found that they didn't correspond with his experience of the Dhamma.

135 The lost essence is the grasping. An arahant no longer has any (real) formations. There are only conditions that form the body, speech, and heart, but no longer determine them as "me and mine". Luang Pū Lā is suggesting that an arahant may have some mental dysfunction, but not the madness of ignorance.

136 Sakka-Saṁyutta 3 (S 11.3)

137 The conflict in Kosambī is documented in various places in the scriptural discourses, and in the Vinaya. Both parties were in the wrong because they had violated one of the basic principles of the Vinaya, namely harmony in common practice. An open dispute cannot be swept under the table, but must be clarified and concluded. Here a

special method was used. If both sides have messed up, the stink can be covered over with grass: both sides acknowledge their wrongdoing and there is no further follow-up investigation. The story with the elephant and the monkey, the template for a popular sculptural ensemble, has its origin in the commentaries.

138 It is not clear which Than Ācān Dī is being referred to. Luang Pū Mun had two well-known disciples with this name: Ñākhū Dī from Sakon Nakhõn (from 1922) and Phra Ācān Dī Channo from Ubon (from 1926).

139 A bhikkhu is not permitted to use water in which there are visible living beings. So, the layman knew his way around the rules.

140 They used a Pāli formula containing the words "... *bhikkhusaṅghassa* onojayāma." This means they donated to the order of bhikkhus, not to a particular person or persons. Donating to the saṅgha is the best way to donate. The subsequent proclamation, apalokana, confirms that the gift received is a gift to the order.

141 The twelfth month according to the lunar calendar is meant here, at the same time the last month of the rainy season, that is, the month after coming out of the rains retreat. According to the solar calendar, it would be October or November.

142 It is referring to thick pieces of fallen bark from a particular coniferous tree. Trees like this are only found in mountainous regions in Thailand, and are rare in North-East Thailand.

143 แก้วเจ้าขา กินข้าวกับกล้วย This is an example of a completely meaningless sentence that is simply parroted. ("My hovercraft is full of eels. ") Luang Pū is probably quoting an *antient* proverb here.

144 "Water, fire, wind, earth" – the four elements.

145 Thai ปรมัตถ์ (paramat), from Pāli paramattha: 1.) the highest benefit, the highest goal – i.e. Nibbāna; 2.) a) the highest meaning, true meaning, e.g. in paramatthasacca [the highest truth]; b) the state in the sense of the highest meaning [...] (Nibbāna is paramat in both aspects). [From the *"Buddhist Dictionary by alphabet"* by P. A. Payutto; the book has a four-page treatise on the multi-layered meanings and usages of the word.]

146 The Pāli and Sanskrit words “vinaya” and “sūtra” underwent a shift in meaning when they were naturalised in the Thai language, something that Luang Pū Lā uses here as a play on words, but which is not discernible as such in English (พระสูตร vs. สูตร).

147 “Are you a human being?” – “Yes, venerable sir.” The questioning in Pāli about the obstacles to being ordained is the most exciting part of the ordination – for those being ordained.

148 This refers to the biography published by Than Phra Mahā Seng Pusso.

149 *Muttodaya* is the name of a collection of summaries of Luang Pū Mun’s talks. The first part of which was written by Ācān Viriyang in 1942/43 at Wat Pā Bān Khohk Nā Mon; it was published in a version heavily edited by Mahā Seng. Thirty years later, Luang Pū Viriyang published his original version which he had memorised after writing it down. Rumour has it that the first draft was made using sooted sticks, writing on tree leaves because there was no proper writing equipment available at the time. The master did not encourage writing.

“Entering into zero-zero (literally: sūnsūn / สูน ๆ)” doesn't mean “going to the toilet”, but rather into the “absolute zero” or “extinguished nothingness”. This passage is not found in the original manuscript of Luang Pū Viriyang. Luang Pū Mun had apparently played with the word “zero” on occasion, but in a different way. Luang Pū Viriyang chose a different spelling for the word “zero”, derived from the Sanskrit word (śūn / ศูนย์), which also translates as “centre”.

150 Ācān Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno was Luang Pū Mun’s right-hand man at the time when the notes for Muttodaya were written. After the master’s death, he went off wandering until the cremation (he probably didn’t want to take part in the three-month spectacle). He would actually have been the competent editor/publisher.

151 “I go for refuge.”

152 A play on words in Thai that is once again difficult to replicate in English; in its original form: loko, lokā, lokere, lokū, lokueng, lomueng / โลโก โลกา โลเกเร โลกู โลกึง โลมึง.

153 Literally “But this is acin-liver, acin-kidney.” A play on words with the naturalised version of the Pāli word *acinteyya* (inconceivable): acin-tap acin-tai – อจินตับอจินไต.

154 Fully ordained bhikkhus are forbidden by the monastic discipline to cut and prune trees.

155 The recitation of sacred texts, especially in the case of death, is a lucrative business for monks with low ethical standards who do not follow their monastic rules and accept money.

156 At the time, no one dared to reproach Luang Pū Mun for his unusual way of cremating corpses in a hurried manner. But apart from him, hardly anyone dared not to make a profit from a monk's corpse. In Thailand, memorial services are organised every day before the cremation takes place, which are also seen as an opportunity to *tham bun*. The longer the corpse of a famous monk lies there, the greater the financial benefit for the monastery in question, but the more the practice rhythm of the kammaṭṭhāna monks is interrupted. Of course, it would be desirable for the followers of a deceased person to have enough time to say their farewells, but this can lead to a conflict of interest.

Luang Pū Mun was uncompromising in this respect, but when he was no longer alive, his example was increasingly ignored. Luang Phõ Chā Subhaddo, for example, was laid out for a year, Khrū Bā Śrī Vichay Vijayo for even several years. The body of *Than Phõ** Lī Dhammadharo has been lying embalmed and uncremated in the sālā at Wat Asokārām for more than 50 years. In the case of Luang Tā Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno, the two months between the casting off of the body and the cremation in 2011 must nowadays be regarded as an extremely short period of time. Rare shining examples in recent times were the cremation of the body of Luang Phõ Prasiddh Puññamāgāro which took place just seven days after his parinibbāna in 2017, and the cremation of Luang Phõ Baen Dhanakaro's body within a couple of days in 2020.

157 Dhammapada 150 and 380: "You are your own protector" or "You are responsible for yourself."

158 This information comes from the commentaries.

159 *"Kusalā dhammā akusalā dhammā ..."* originates from the first book of the Abhidhamma (Dhammasaṅganī); *"aniccā vata saṅkhārā ..."* from the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16; both texts are traditionally recited in the event of death.

160 This refers to a fish preparation that doesn't cost much. The original text lists: ปลาร้าปลาเจ่าปิ้งแกงปลาแดกและน้ำปลา; plā rā (fermented "stinky fish"), plā cao ping kaeng (cured grilled fish with sauce), plā daek (fermented fish), nam plā (fish sauce).

161 Not necessary: the story of Paṭācārā is detailed in the commentary to Dhammapada verse 113; the verses relating to her liberation are in the Therīgāthā 112 – 116.

162 Than Ācān Niam Jotiko had died of tuberculosis, Than Ācān Sõ Sumaṅgalo of malaria.

163 "Birth is suffering." This statement can be found in many scriptural discourses, for example in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya 56.11, and is part of the traditional morning pūjā.

164 Sic! Also idiomatic in Thai: ขูด ๆ เกลา ๆ (khūd khūd klao klao).

165 รู้ทัน (rū than): "the realisation that is a match (for something)" literally means: to know *in time.*

166 Phra Ācān Singh Kantyāgamo (1889-1964), Phra Ācān Õn Ñāṇasiri (1902-1981) and Phra Ācān Kongmā Cirapuñño (1900-1962) were important students of Luang Pū Mun from the first generation, i.e. before 1928; Phra Ācān Mahā Thõngsuk Sucitto (1908-1963) met Luang Pū Mun for the first time in the Chiang Mai period in the 1930s.

167 These four offences disqualify a bhikkhu for life; therefore they are explained to him immediately after ordination.

168 Devadatta, the Buddha's opponent, was already halfway in the ground at this time, and was about to be swallowed up by the earth, so he couldn't raise his hands. This and the following information comes from the commentary to the Dhammapada.

169 Immediate kamma refers to serious actions whose consequences cannot be averted. Devadatta had hurt the Buddha, which prevented supramundane realisation in that lifetime.

170 It can only be guessed what it might be. In Thai it starts with ง.

171 The wonderful plays on words in the preceding and following paragraphs are unfortunately lost in translation.

172 What he is pointing out is that the heart and the qualities of the heart are different things, but that it is not expressed that way in language.

173 The crickets (จั๊กจั่น) in Thailand don't chirp, but rather make a deafening noise for which there is no suitable word in English. Trumpeting would come closest, but the sound is not produced by wind movement, but by the legs rubbing against the insect's body.

174 Years of time spent in the monastic order are counted in "rains". In some communities, it is customary for all monks in the monastery to take nissaya with the master, even if they have the status of "nissaya exempt", like the two monks mentioned here. On the one hand, this is a gesture of respect towards the teacher, but at the same time it devalues the genuine nissaya relationship of the younger monks to an empty ritual. Not asking for nissaya in such a case is a sign of respect for the Dhammavinaya.

175 Strict adherence to this practice requires that any solid food is eaten from the bowl. Drinking a beverage from a cup – water, juice, black coffee – does not violate this rule. However, milk is considered food, and ice cubes are water in solid form. Samõ and makhām põm mixed with salt and chilli are eaten for example from a small plate in the afternoon. But it's not advisable to eat a large amount, otherwise the constipation will turn into diarrhoea. The fact that Luang Pū Lā lists these insignificant deviations from the standard practice here is testament to his extraordinary conscientiousness. Eating from the bowl is a hallmark of the forest tradition. But many forest monks who claim to observe this practice nowadays eat noodle dishes from an extra bowl and have one or more little cups of ice cream or other desserts next to their alms bowl. They eat fruit from the lid of their bowl and yoghurt from the carton. There is at least one monk who eats gummy bears from the lid of his stainless-steel cup during the weekly Saṅgha meetings.

176 *Opanayiko paccattaṁ:* "leading inward (or across), personal" are qualities that are contemplated when reflecting on Dhamma.

177 In the Thai language, "bõn" five times, each time with a different one of the five Thai tones: บอน บ่อน บ้อน บ๊อน บ๋อน. Only the first two words have any meaning.

178 None of these terms appear in the Pāli Canon. *Nāmadhamma* only appears in the commentary to the Khuddaka Nikāya. In Thai usage, it is a term that refers to things that cannot be experienced with the five material senses, but rather only with the mind (see Payutto, ibid.). The

other terms are creations of the author.

An attempt at an interpretation of this passage: name (in Pāli: *nāma*) is the *appearance* of that which is experienced, its de-*scribing*, and together with form or "matter" (*rūpa* – which is the *resistance* in experience, that which "triggers" the senses) it constitutes *the experienced* or the content of the experience. Name consists of: feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention. Name-and-form (*nāmarūpa*, the experienced) together with the *presence* of that which is experienced (*viññāṇa*, or consciousness) make up *the experience* as a whole (see Majjhima Nikāya 9 and Dīgha Nikāya 15).

Cittasaṅkhāra is that which forms the heart, namely perception and feeling. However, the context also allows the assumption that the author may have meant *manosaṅkhāra* here, i.e. mental activity, thinking (Luang Pū Mun also sometimes used the word *citta* instead of *mano*).

Conclusion: whether the mind produces meaningful or nonsensical things is ultimately irrelevant because by being part of what is experienced, which is both conditioned and condition, they are equally subject to the three characteristics. Viewed from this perspective, meaningful things are no better than nonsensical things.

179 Dhammavinaya was recited by consensus at the first council that was held after the Buddha's parinibbāna and established as canon. At the second and third councils, the canon was expanded and modified. All further changes made at later councils can no longer be considered authentic in the sense of the Buddha's teaching and only affect certain individual schools. The "improvements" of the so-called "Sixth Council" of the Theravāda tradition in Burma in 1957 caused more confusion than benefit.

The call for a next council quoted here expresses dissatisfaction with the canon, in particular with certain monastic rules that could only be changed or revoked by means of a council. But no such thing has ever taken place.

180 *Dhammācān* or *dhammācariya* are not to be found in the Dhammavinaya or in Somdet Payutto's dictionaries. The expression appears in a commentary called Peṭakopadesa and simply means "Dhamma teacher". However, Luang Pū Lā obviously means the awakened contemporaries of the Buddha. At the time of the Blessed One, monks ad-

dressed each other as "āvuso" (friend) without distinction – even when Sāriputta was still a wandering ascetic of another sect. It was only a few minutes before his parinibbāna that the Supreme Teacher decreed that seniority should henceforth be reflected in the form of address.

"Khrū Bā" has lost much of its sense of formality as a form of address nowadays. Sometimes younger monks are also addressed as *Khrū Bā* or *Than*, but not as *Khuṇ*, as was customary in Luang Pū Lā's time. According to the Vinaya, a monk with more years in the order is addressed as *Bhante*, according to Thai custom as *Ācān* or *Phra Ācān*, *Than Ācān, Than Phra Ācān, Khrūcān, Khrūbācān, Luang Phõ, Luang Pū, Luang Tā, Than Phra Khrū, Than Cao Khuṇ* and so on up to *Father-and-Mother Khrū Bā Ācān*, depending on the situation.

181 *Mahākhandha* has already been explained. *Paṭhamasambodhikathā* is a post-canonical historical work in Pāli that contains an expanded biography of the Buddha and extends to the time of Emperor Asoka. The book was expanded and revised (and presumably translated into Thai) in 1844 by a monk of noble birth, Phra Mahāsamaṇa Cao Kromphra Paramānujitajinorasa. It seems to have been popular in Thailand.

182 The story is found in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16. The commentary to the Suttanipāta describes a kind of house invitation where the food was served on golden crockery. In the discourse, however, it says that the Blessed One had prepared for the alms round before taking his last meal.

183 Later, the proceeds from the ceremonies were indeed used to build an Uposatha hall at Wat Pā Suddhāvās, ironically on the exact site of the cremation.

184 The British equivalents of ไทยรัฐ and สยามรัฐ.

185 The commentaries to the verses in the Dhammapada of course don't refer to the means of transport mentioned here, but there are several stories in which monks are called upon to be frugal.

186 A saying that expresses a numerical ratio.

187 Phra Ācān Sao Kantasīlo was Luang Pū Mun's teacher during his first ten years in the monastic order. His exact date of birth is not known (around 1860). He laid down his body on 3 February 1942.

188 The Thai language has a number of very specific terms for the activity of carrying. See the appendix on page 399.

189 Later there were water pipes in Wat Phū Cõ Kõ.

190 What he means is that he doesn't want to send the lay guests away just because it's time to sweep.

191 Luang Hū Luang Tā (หลวงหูหลวงตา): Tā means "eye" or "maternal grand father".

192 It wasn't possible to find out whether such a book actually exists or ever existed. It could be a tongue-in-cheek allusion to the prolific writing of King Vajiravudh. The quote, however, does indeed begin with an ancient proverb describing a phoney or a person of bad character but with nice manners. It's not clear from Luang Pū Lā's original text where the quotation ends. The closing quotation mark has been placed in this position after careful consideration. However, according to the latest edition of the Thai text (see Sources) the quote extends all the way to the end of the chapter.

193 Phra Ācān Thet Desaraṁsī (1902-1994) was a first-generation disciple of Luang Pū Mun, who even followed the master as far as Chiang Mai in the 1930s.

194 The registration of monks in a fully established monastery was introduced at the beginning of the 20th century. Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue was only a samnak in which registration was not possible. It was considered an offshoot or branch of Wat Pā Suddhāvās, so to speak.

195 Phra Ācān Sīho Khemako (later settled in Wat Pā Śrī Phraiwan, Rõi Et) and Phra Ācān Kwā Sumano (later settled in Wat Pā Klāng Nõng Phū, Sakhon Nakhõn) had been first generation disciples of Luang Pū Mun.

196 The word "therānutherā" is apparently found only once in the canon (Vinaya, Cullavagga VIII.4.1, in the chapter on *kiccavatta**). It means "theras and almost theras", i.e. monks with more than 10, and almost 10 years in the monastic order. In Thailand, the term has undergone a shift in meaning and has become a formal, especially respectful collective term for long-standing monks.

In Thailand, the principle of "the higher the rank, the longer the title; the deeper the respect, the longer the form of address" applies. This is probably why the double term *thera-anutherā* was coined as a polite

collective term for long-standing monks.

197 Phra Ācān Mahā Bua reported in his Luang Pū Mun biography: "About ten minutes after being injected with the sleep-inducing medication, he fell asleep." Phra Ācān Viriyang probably didn't think this was glorious enough. In his biography, he ascribed the following final words to the Venerable Luang Pū Mun: "I will enter the silence of the jhānas." Luang Pū Mun died of tuberculosis.

198 Luang Pū Bunlāy – it is not clear which monk is meant here. Phra Ācān Koeng Adhimuttako (1887-1965) became a disciple of the Great Master in 1926, Phra Ācān Sim Buddhācāro (1909-1992) met Luang Pū Mun in the 1930s. Extremely little is known about Phra Ācān Sān Dhammasāro. He features in a number of reports by other Khrū Bā Ācāns in which he appeared on the scene several times during the 1930s. His appearances were brief, but always in crucial, historically-charged moments, almost like a divine messenger. He was a first generation disciple, and it seems that he had very strong and close bonds with his teacher.

199 Both literally and in prose: "It's not possible to take this as a gauge because the [metre] Klõn takes us with it." The entire passage is in this metre, but by "Klõn" Luang Pū Lā probably means the external form of knowledge in general. An interpretation here is that, in the context of the previous prose text: whether one knows a lot or a little says nothing about one's inner progress, if insight, mindfulness and wisdom are not in play.

200 *Phra Rājagaṇa;* it is a term for monks who bear one of the titles bestowed by the king: Cao Khuṇ and Somdet.

201 The Jetavana Monastery (Victor Forest) and Pubbārāma (Eastern Grove) were located in Sāvatthī, Veḷuvana (Bamboo Forest) was in Rājagaha, Nigrodhārāma near Kapilavatthu, Kūṭāgāra Mahāvana (the large forest with the pointed roof hall) near Vesālī. *Vana* means forest or grove, *ārāma* means grove or park. Both words have undergone an expansion in meaning and are synonyms for forest monasteries. Many important scriptural discourses were given in all the forest monasteries mentioned.

202 The Thai word for "character" (nisay, นิสัย) comes from the Pāli word *nissaya*: support, protection, help.

203 “The monastic community has ownership of the robes and bowl of a deceased bhikkhu. [...] I decree that the monastic community shall give the threefold robe and bowl to those who have cared for the sick person. Other light items and requisites may be divided among the community present.” (Mahāvagga VIII.27)

204 In other words, it was a rare collector’s item, it was hidden away and out of reach.

205 Luang Tā Thõngkham recounts: “The real bowl was presented by Phra Ācān Mahā Thõngsuk to his upajjhāya, Cao Khuṇ Phra Dhammacedī (Cūm Bandhulo). The bowl in the museum is from the Kaṭhina celebration of [LP Mun’s] last year, which Than Phra Ācān didn’t get around to using any more.”; from *Ramluek wan wān* (Memories of Yesterday).

206 Rows of columns inside the sālā were necessary due to the large span of the roof construction – an elaborate construction method for the time.

207 To provide an explanation of this passage by way of introducing the problems of the lunar calendar would go beyond the scope of this book. Not even all bhikkhus in Thailand fully understand it. The annual dual Uposatha calendar (it combines the main system and the pakkhagaṇanā system) on the publisher’s website (in German or English) provides a few important points of reference.

208 In such cases, it is not considered an offence because the sloppiness is not a result of intent or negligence, but rather of incompetence.

209 That was 31 January 1950 according to the Gregorian calendar.

210 *Pārājika* (literally: defeat) is an offence against the monastic discipline of the most serious nature, and which entails disqualification. A monk automatically loses his monk status and cannot be re-ordained. Substantial theft is one of four offences in this class. In this case, however, it is questionable as to whether the criteria would have been met because bone remains have little or no material value. Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī’s deterrent measure was nevertheless justified because the kammic consequences in this case – theft of things of intangible value – would probably have been serious.

211 The names of the events suggest that they may have been major celebrations connected with the festivities in the year 2500 of the Buddhist calendar: Buddha Jayanti, the Sixth Council and so on in 1957.

212 This passage contains quite a bit of juggling around with different speaker points of view and nested direct speech, recognisable only by the corresponding pronouns due to a lack of inverted commas in Thai: "he" – in this case *ong than* (องค์ท่าน) – is probably referring to Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī.

213 Here the author didn't feel it necessary to point out that no money transaction from monk to monk was meant. Later in this book, Luang Pū Lā points out that he never used money as a matter of principle, and in accordance with Vinaya. Phra Ācān Suphat was supposed to ensure that lay people bought a ticket.

214 Disenchantment, dispassion, liberation, purification.

215 The last paragraph refers to the period of time until the arahant discards the last body. The arahant also practices meditation, but has nothing left to accomplish with it.

216 At this present time, they are also known as tuk-tuks. And at a time in the not too distant future, they may no longer exist. The following sentence plays on the various terms in Thai for "time" which cannot be fully reproduced in English. It is quite possible that he wanted to point out that the present is not a "point in time" but rather a period or time span within which things happen (see "paccuppanno addhā", Dīgha Nikāya 33 et. al.).

217 Bangkok had an electrically operated tramway from the end of the 19th century. This service ceased in 1968.

218 The Venerable Can Sohm Kittikāro was a disciple of Luang Pū Mun from the last generation. He was born on 12 June 1922, received upasampadā on 18 April 1942 in Wat Araññavāsī, Nõng Khāi, from Luang Pū Thet Desaraṁsī, spent two years with Luang Pū Mun, later built Wat Pā Bān Nā Sī Dā in the district of Bān Phue, Udõn province, and died on 7 March 2006.

219 The author consistently uses this expression when referring to Luang Pū Mun's end of life (in Thai *sin lom prāṇ* / สิ้นลมปราณ). It is noticeable

that he avoids the very formal and polite expressions usually used in Thai to refer to the death of a monk: *mõraṇaphāp* / มรณภาพ (from Pāli maraṇabhāva, literally "to be dead") or *la saṅkhān* / ละสังขาร ("casting off the formations"). And it is entirely correct and appropriate to refrain from using these when referring to the end of an arahant's life because an arahant has attained the Deathless and has no more formations.

220 Ven. Thõngphūn Sirikāmo, Wat Sāmaggī-Upatham, Nõng Khāi.

221 Phra Ācān Viriyang Sirindharo was born on 7 January 1920 in the province of Saraburī. On 22 May 1935, he became a novice at Wat Suddhacindā in the province of Khorāt. On 20 May 1941, he received upasampadā. From 1942 to 1946, Phra Ācān Viriyang was Luang Pū Mun's attendant, one of his closest disciples and an important chronicler, to whom we owe a great deal in terms of information about Luang Pū Mun's life and teachings. On 22 December 2020, Luang Pū Viriyang took his last breath in Wat Dhammamongkhon in Bangkok.

222 Than Ācān Baen Dhanakaro, born on 2 July 1928 in the province of Canthaburī, upasampadā on 24 May 1949, was a student of Luang Pū Kongmā, in the 1950s his deputy, and from 1962 abbot at Wat Dõi Dhammacedī, where he laid down his body on 16 January 2020. On 5 December 1991 (King Bhūmipol's birthday), he was appointed Cao Khuṇ, with the title Phra Bhāvanavisuddhiñāṇa Thera. He was one of the strictest heirs of Luang Pū Mun, although he had never lived with the Great Master.

223 Ven. Thavin Ciṇṇadhammo, Wat Dhammahansārām, Canthaburī.

224 It's even funnier in Thai: "Khen song, mi chai khon song." (เข็นส่งมิใช่ขนส่ง).

225 *Caroen Phõn* (เจริญพร), literally "growth in blessings", is the usual way in which a monk greets lay people (not *Sawatdī*). The magistrate could therefore tell from the very first word of the letter that it was written by a monk. And Khuṇ Lā could see at a glance which of the two letters was not intended for him.

226 The personal pronoun – *kaeh* (แก), "he" – shows that the author has less respect for Mahāyāna monks than for Theravāda monks.

The Venerable Kaccāyana is a popular figure in Chinese Mahāyāna. Statues show him as a fat, ugly monk. He corresponds to the Venerable Kaccāna in Theravāda, but his legend is not identical to the biography of the First among those, who were able to explain a concise teaching of the Buddha in detail.

The dialogue is even funnier in its original form: พูดภาษาจีงเป็งไหม – ไม่เป็ง.

227 Phra Ācān Sām Akiñcano was born on 12 September 1899 in Bān Nā Sām, Surin province. He received his ordination in the Mahānikāya in 1925. His interest in meditation led him to Luang Pū Dūn Atulo. The Venerable Sām quickly learned how to collect his mind, so his teacher sent him to Luang Pū Mun for advanced training. Re-ordination took place on 6 May 1928. Apart from a brief interruption, he was a participant in the Dhamma mission in the south from 1952 to 1959. Luang Pū Sām entered Nibbāna without remainder on 1 February 1991. He was an ascetic who distinguished himself by his strict observation of the dhutaṅga practices. He did not have many disciples. The most famous of them was probably Luang Phõ Plian Paññāpadīpo.

The Venerable Lā had already got to know Phra Ācān Sām better in the time before Luang Pū Mun's cremation, since Phra Ācān Sām played a substantial role in the organisation of the event. It is strange that the author here simply addresses Luang Pū Sām, who was so much older than himself, as "Ācān". Maybe ethnic differences are the reason for this. Among the Lao-Thais we occasionally notice a certain distance to the Khmer-Thais, who, in addition to Phra Ācān Sām, have another outstanding representative among the Kammaṭṭhāna monks in Luang Pū Dūn Atulo. Luang Pū Dūn was one of the first and most important disciples of Luang Pū Mun, but in Phra Ācān Mahā's book about the Great Master he is not mentioned with a single syllable.

228 The journey to the south was part of a large-scale initiative to establish the Dhammayut order in southern Thailand. A personal note from Ācān Mettiko: I know from my own experience that the exemplary monks around Luang Pū Thet have left a lasting impression on the people there and still live in their hearts.

229 A play on words in Thai: the word "to preach" is thet (เทศน์) in Thai, but it is written differently from the name of Luang Pū Thet (เทสก์).

230 Luang Pū Thet's autobiography has details of the Dhammayut mission in the south (Phūket, Phang Ngā, Krabī provinces). More than a hundred monks lived in the various newly built monasteries. Most of them came from Īsān, but there were also interested locals who asked for ordination. By 1964, all the monks from the north-east had returned home, and the monasteries were handed over to the monks from the south. The high standard of practice could not be maintained in the period that followed.

231 Phra Ācān Rian Varalābho was a disciple of Luang Pū Mun from the second generation (Chiang Mai period). He was born on 8 January 1912 in the district of Śī Chiang Mai, Nõng Khāi province. Ordination (M) in January 1932, re-ordination (Dh) on 19 April 1933 with Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī. In 1938 he lived together with Luang Pū Mun in Chiang Mai province and remained in the north until 1951. After that he was part of the Dhamma mission in the south for eight years. His last breath was on 5 June 2005.

232 Robes dyed with jackfruit heartwood decoction become more or less colour-fast after about half a year. They can then be washed with water without this plant dye. But in the beginning, washing with jackfruit heartwood is absolutely necessary to preserve the colour. Since there was no forest tradition infrastructure in the south, the Venerable Lā could not count on getting jackfruit heartwood for washing. (Note: a monk who goes out in the rain with a new robe freshly dyed like this will look like a zebra afterwards.)

233 Brahmajāla Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 1: In the very first discourse in the basket of scriptural discourses, 28 topics and types of conversation are listed as being so-called animal talk. A monk refrains from them when his ethics have reached a medium level of refinement. Animals are not explicitly mentioned as a particular topic, but they probably fall under village and city chatter.

234 It is customary for bhikkhus to contemplate their food before eating. During this time, they lower their gaze into the bowl. The thera referred to here merely imitates the external form. He looks into the bowl as everyone does, but his mind is not on the contemplation.

235 *Phõ Than* is a form of address for monks that is only used in southern Thailand. In eastern Thailand, the expression Than Phõ is used, which has also become known in Kammaṭṭhāna circles through Phra Ācān

(Than Phõ) Lī Dhammadharo and Phra Ācān (Than Phõ) Fueang Jotiko.

236 That is to say that his practice of the four *brahmaviharas* had become so much a part of his flesh and blood that he found it difficult to be judgemental and to harbour feelings of dissociation.

237 He does not claim to be an arahant. According to monastic rules, an arahant may only disclose his attainment to other monks.

238 *Rai* is actually a measure of area and corresponds to 1600 square metres. When rai is used in casual conversation as a measure of length it refers to the edge length of a square that has the area of one rai, namely 40 metres. So the rice field was 120 metres wide and 800 metres long.

239 These were simple actions to make the place a little more suitable for an overnight stay, but which a monk is not allowed to do. Presumably, wild banana leaves were cut and a piece of bamboo was chopped off for the holder.

240 See Aṅguttara Nikāya 7.58.

241 When spending time in caves with high humidity and little air movement, extreme drowsiness is a well-known phenomenon. Another well-known phenomenon: when lacking in practice, the attempt to concentrate on an inner light has the same effect as a sleeping pill.

242 Here a literal translation of the original Thai. In English we would say "breezed in".

243 The Thai version of a meal container is called a pinto. It is made up of a stack of small pots of enamelled steel in a holder. The uppermost pot has a lid and also doubles as a lid for the pot below. A pinto usually has three to five pots. In some regions, monks take one on alms round. So *piṇḍapāta** becomes *pintopāta*.

244 In the 1970s and early 1980s, southern Thailand was a conflict area due to the activities of communist guerrillas.

245 In Thai thinking, the idea that we have a kammic connection with other beings over many lifetimes is widespread. It can represent a bad situation: the *cao kamm nai wehn* (เจ้ากรรมในเวร), an enemy to whom you give merit in order to finally bury the enmity. Or it can also

represent a wholesome partnership: *Khū sāng bāramī* (คู่สร้างบารมี).

246 This is most likely a regional term. Based on the description, it was probably a *Ngū Cong Āng*, a king cobra. It does not belong to the genus of actual cobras and is the only snake that can slither forward in an upright position.

247 The five types of immediate kamma: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arahant, harming a buddha, and splitting the order. These actions inevitably bear fruit in the very next life, namely in hell. The starting point of the ethical rules is to refrain from killing living beings.

248 Birth from the mother's womb, from an egg, through cell division and through spontaneous emergence in an ethereal body.

249 A traditional medicine that is no longer available.

250 A bhikkhu may only eat food after it has been given to him directly. While the Chinese man had given him the packed lunch (i.e., donated it to him), he had not given it to him directly, instead placing it on the luggage rack.

251 Luang Pū Lā continues Luang Pū Waen's pun even further: (Dhammo), Dhamm mau, Dhamm mua (ธรรมเมาธรรมมัว – see also note 6 on page 418).

This pun probably arose when LP Waen tried to write the word "Dhammo" in Dhamma script, *Aksõn Dhamm*, which has no separate letter for the long "o", as is the case in many Abudiga scripts (but not in the Thai script!). The missing long "o" is replaced by the vowel *-au*. So, he wanted to write "Dhammo" and noticed that all he could do was to write "Dhammau", which then turned into "Dhamm mau". (Cp. Gautama and Gotama, Kausambi and Kosambi and so on.)

252 The Yot Se Bridge crosses a railway line on the Ratanakosin side of Bangkok in a high arch. The total distance from Phra Can Pier to Wat Boromnivās is almost 5 kilometres.

253 There is a lot between the lines here that will probably not be readily apparent to most readers.

Learned city monks and practising forest monks have different lifestyles. When they meet, it can lead to unfamiliar and potentially

problematic situations. Luang Pū Lā principally ate from the bowl and apparently only wanted to eat the food that he had received on alms round. He also practised in a way so that at the beginning of the meal there was no more rice and accompanying dishes in the bowl than he could eat, and almost nothing was left at the end. But because he had received much more from his alms round, he had to take rice out of his bowl before eating. (It is not clear whether he emptied his bowl completely and then refilled it, or just took out the excess – probably the latter.) For this, he used the communal spoon with which the mahās served food from the tureens and bowls provided in the monastery onto their plates. They ate from the plates with their private spoons. Monastic discipline requires that a monk should not, for reasons of hygiene, serve himself using his private spoon in a communal vessel (Cullavagga V.19,2). Perhaps the author felt that using the communal spoon somewhat corrupted his practice of only eating food from the alms round because the spoon was in a container in which other rice or food had been placed. Perhaps he was also embarrassed by having put the communal spoon in his private bowl. But the relaxed atmosphere with the mahās, who all came from his homeland, made him willing to compromise on this point. The last sentence is perhaps also an allusion to the fact that no spoon is needed to take sticky rice (which he most likely did not get on alms round in Bangkok) from an alms bowl. The author did not use a spoon to *eat* from the bowl, he ate with his hand.

The "kuṭi" at the turtle pond was apparently a larger building.

254 Luang Pū Mun did not mean the monk mentioned in note 181 on page 437, but rather another high-ranking monk who came from the royal family: Somdet Phra Mahāsamaṇa Cao Kromphrayā Vajirañāṇavarorasa. He reorganised the educational system in the order and was the author of important instructional texts that are still used today, such as "Vinayamukha" (a modern commentary on the Vinaya) and "Navakovāda" (a teaching compendium for new monks). In the last years of his life, he was even the *Saṅgharāja**. He died in 1921.

255 Than Cao Khuṇ Dhammacedī (Cūm Bandhulo) was already a disciple of the Venerables Sao Kantasīlo and Mun Bhūridatto as a novice at the age of 14 dating from 1902.

256 Phra Ācān Chaluay Sudhammo, born in 1906, was ordained in the Mahānikāya for twenty years. In 1948 he was re-ordained in the Dhammayutnikāya. He died on 30 January 1993. The author knew him from his time with Luang Pū Mun. Luang Phõ Chā Subhaddo spent more time with Ācān Chaluay in Wat Yai Chayamongkhon – more than a year .

257 The *next step* (ก้าวหน้า) is a somewhat nebulous term in the Thai Kammaṭṭhāna monks' scene. By implication, it usually refers to stream-entry. This is the case here too: accepting kamma is an expression of worldly right view – the prerequisite for supramundane right view, which is a factor of the path (see Mahācattārīsaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 117).

258 All the other monks ate from plates. Than Cao Khuṇ may have been concerned that the Venerable Lā would follow his example out of politeness. Most likely, there were no facilities to wash the bowl provided at that location. Many monks do not eat all the food which is in their bowls. There are different reasons for this: 1. The last bite is dedicated to the hungry ghosts. 2. The impression should be avoided that the food provided was not enough. 3. To *scrape* the bowl empty with a spoon is an offence. By strict interpretation, scraping the bowl with the hand is also considered an offence.

259 Dhammapada 204.

260 To call the older monk *Khuṇ Phõ* is certainly not appropriate for a novice, even if Luang Phõ Ming was his biological father. The author expresses his disapproval of the arrogant behaviour of the nehn in the following account of the journey. For the reader it is made clear that he and the novice were not travelling *together*, but rather that the novice was simply there: Luang Pū Lā only mentions the novice very briefly and only in passing, and avoids the use of personal pronouns (*I* or *we*). This is not possible in English. The Thai language is more subtle in this respect.

261 A gesture of respect, as previously explained; with eight rains retreats behind him, the Venerable Lā was no longer obliged to take nissaya.

262 We have already come across Khuṇ Pheng as the novice Bunpheng. He was born on 10 October 1929 in Yasothõn province and stayed with Luang Pū Mun from 1945 until his last breath in 1949. Shortly

before this he received higher ordination from Phra Ācān Mahā Thõngsuk Sucitto in Wat Suddhāvās, to become Bhikkhu Khemābhirato. He spent a couple of years with Luang Pū Mahā, until finally settling down in 1960 with Luang Pū Khāo Anālayo in Wat Tham Klõng Phen, Nõng Bua Lamphū province. He served his teacher for 23 years until his parinibbāna in 1983. After that he served as head of the monastery until his own last breath on 27 February 2018.

There doesn't seem to be any information available on Khuṇ Sīhā, a nephew of Ācān Wan, not even his ordination name. He probably didn't survive for very long in robes or possibly at all.

263 Phra Ācān Singhthõng Dhammavaro was born on 12 July 1924 in the province of Ubon, where he also received upasampadā twenty years later. He was with Luang Pū Mun for two years, but only lived in Wat Pā Bān Nõng Phue for a short time. Instead, he stayed in the samnaks of Luang Pū Õn Ñāṇasiri (1948) and Luang Pū Lui Candasāro (1949), both not far from Nõng Phue. After the master's parinibbāna, he lived together with Luang Pū Mahā for several years until he became the head of his own monastery, Wat Pā Kaeo Chumphon in the province of Sakon Nakhõn. Phra Ācān Singhthõng died in a plane crash on 12 April 1980, together with Phra Ācān Bunmā Ṭhitapemo, Phra Ācān Cuan Kulajeṭṭho, Phra Ācān Wan Uttamo and Phra Ācān Supat Sukhakāmo.

264 According to Thai belief, the northern direction is the more prestigious one. It is higher up on the map and higher in rank. Ācān Singhthõng's hut was newer but it lay to the south, that is, "below". Than Lā considered it a privilege to live to the north of Phra Ācān Mahā.

265 The monks are listed according to their monastic age, with the senior monks first. The author seems to have reversed the order of the novices. *Nõi* is a nickname in Thai, but *Nehn Nõi* ("little Nehn") is a term for very young sāmaṇeras. It is the name of all novices under, say, 12 years of age. That is why two of them are listed here. Nehn Soh, at 19 years old, was probably the oldest.

266 Bān Tād was Luang Pū Mahā Bua's home village and Wat Pā Bān Tād in which he lived from its founding in 1955 until his parinibbāna in 2011 was his monastery, In Kammaṭṭhāna circles, it is said that in 1993, at the age of 80, Luang Pū announced that he wanted to give up his role as forger of monks in order to be more available as a teacher

to the lay people who visited his monastery in droves. However, Luang Pū Lā's records date back to the early 1980s. So the change of course must have taken place earlier.

From the perspective of a practice monk, this development may certainly be regretted. However, there were and are enough monks who, even without Luang Pū's teaching, gained advantage from being in the presence of a famous Khrū Bā Ācān. Oh impermanence!

A personal note from Mettiko Bhikkhu: On the other hand, I am grateful that Luang Pū Lā also invested time and energy in receiving visitors. Otherwise I would never have been able to meet him.

267 Luang Pū Lā had probably worn all three robes during the alms round. He wore the upper and lower robes while eating, and the outer robe (Saṅghāṭi) was still hanging on the line.

268 The owner of the burnt requisites and the associated kamma.

269 Huay Sāi was a small samnak. There were no pantries full of requisites. As for the sewing of robes, this time of year was "out of season". So it was not so easy to replace the saṅghāṭi, shoulder cloths and a few bathing cloths. (It seems that Luang Pū Lā received a full set of the triple robes.) Much merit for Mae Chī Kaeo and her relatives! It is especially noteworthy that the author uses the respectful personal pronoun *than* (ท่าน) for her.

270 Read more on this topic in *Mae Chee Kaew – Her path to spiritual awakening,* her biography by Ācān Sīlaratano Bhikkhu. Ācān Cia' Cundo, 6 June 1916 – 23 August 2004, was a disciple of Luang Pū Mun from the Chiang Mai period. Luang Pū Mahā didn't leave Wat Bān Tād again until he laid down his body there on 30 January 2011.

271 "Father, Mother" (in Thai *Phõ, Mae*) are respectful forms of address for older lay people. The suffix *õk* means "out" and refers to lay people who often go out to the monastery.

272 "To inquire" could mean, for example, as to whether things are being done in the right way. At present, the reputation of the order in Thailand is being shaken by financial scandals because monks are receiving gains that are not in line with Dhamma.

273 An Annamese is a resident of Annam, a part of the former French colonial Indochina, present-day Vietnam.

274 *Ñākhrū* or *Ñākhū* is an old title for monks that was used in North-East Thailand in the past.

275 Thai kinship terms automatically include a ranking structure that is largely lost in translation.

276 Literally: *Lūknõng*, "children and younger siblings", meant here in a figurative sense.

277 Literally "Someone who has the guts to wear the cloth is ready for the whole thing." An anāgārika (in Thai: pakhāo, "white cloth wearer") in Thailand usually wears a white sabong, no longer trousers. However, he does not yet have an upper robe.

278 The ninth month usually begins in July according to the Gregorian calendar.

279 *Ngū Ka'pa'* (งูกะปะ), the Siamese Russell's viper; its bite can be fatal under some circumstances.

280 These months of the Thai lunar calendar usually fall between January and April.

281 Luang Pū bends the grammatical rules in the Pāli language a little with his play on words. The intended meaning is: those who want to attain liberation must first understand the nature of suffering.

282 Luang Pū Cām Mahāpuñño was born on 19 May 1910 in Bān Huay Sāi. In 1939, he received upāsampadā and subsequently became a disciple of Luang Pū Mun in the province of Chiang Mai. After Luang Pū Mun's return to Īsān, Venerable Cām still remained in the north in Phrāo district for several years, together with, among others, Luang Pū Waen Suciṇṇo. When Phra Ācān Cām also returned to North-East Thailand, he founded the Wat Pā Vivekavaḍḍhanāram monastery in Mukdāhān province, where Ācān Mettiko had the privilege of meeting him in 1995. Luang Pū Cām laid down his body on 19 January 2013 at the age of 103.

283 "Endowed with the spiritual qualities of determination and truthfulness."

A personal note from Ācān Mettiko: I am absolutely convinced that the last paragraph is not empty talk, but a genuine Lion's Roar from Luang Pū. It seems as if he wanted to conclude the book here.

Fortunately for us and for our edification, he still had a few more things to say.

284 Lying on our stomachs, lying on our backs is a figurative reference to being upside down or right side up.

285 Hāb, hiu, baehk, khõn.

286 *Pueay*, (เปื่อย) means "rotten" in Thai. But the word "pueay wood" here is referring to the wood of the pueay tree (ต้นเปือย [spelt without the tone marker], *Lagerstroemia duperreana*, the "giant crape myrtle"). It sheds its bark in thin flakes and that is why this tree indeed is known as ต้นเปื่อยนา (*rotten* rice field tree) or ต้นเปื่อยหางค่าง (*rotten* macaque tail tree) in Northern Thailand. This is a bit confusing, but in any case, they didn't use rotten planks to build the kuṭi.

287 The division into chapters differs slightly from the original, and was made based on the content. The transition from the autobiography, which is interspersed with reflections on Dhamma, to Dhamma lessons with occasional biographical notes is fluid; therefore, the division is somewhat arbitrary. The division in the original was probably not made by the author himself, but rather added later during preparation for printing.

288 See Kevaṭṭa Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 11:

"Where do water, earth, fire and wind have no support? ..."

– "Consciousness that does not point to anything, infinite, luminous, separate from all, this is where water, earth, fire and wind have no support. ... This is where name and form have come to a complete standstill without remainder."

289 นามนิยม/ nāmaniyom: Luang Pū Lā's neologism with a negative connotation; an ism in the spiritual realm, the counterpart to materialism. By materialism, however, Luang Pū Lā does not mean a philosophical or ideological orientation, but rather the grasping of experience in the realm of the five "material" senses. Spiritualism is then the grasping of the mental naming and processing of the experience of the "material" senses.

290 "Immeasurable are the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha." This quote comes from the Khandha Paritta in Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.67.

291 Literally "one who does not beat oneself to death before the fever sets in". This refers to an attitude of giving up too quickly and acting in accordance with such an attitude.

292 สูญ ๆ สาญ ๆ/ sūnsūn sānsān: Luang Pū Lā's word creation and play on words has a mocking undertone. Luang Pū Lā makes fun of academic discussions on topics such as emptiness, not-self and so on in various places in his writings.

293 Upādāna, grasping, taking up or attachment is contained in the five khandhas and is therefore itself the object of taking up. See Cūḷavedalla Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 44.

294 Cittasaṅkhāra: perception and feeling.

295 A subtle joke: the number doesn't only refer to 2524 months – it is also the year of the transcription according to the Buddhist calendar; this corresponds to the year 1981 in the Christian calendar.

296 This subtle difference is difficult to express in English: things do not "move through time"; rather change *is* time. Things are dependently arisen in the present.

297 See Dhammapada verse 93.

298 In Thailand, there are many people who listen to monks' Dhamma discourses in order to find clues for lottery numbers. There are certainly enough numbers in the Buddha's teaching. Luang Pū Lā addresses an attitude in which the teachings are regarded as a kind of reservoir for magic formulas for mastering worldly tasks and achieving worldly goals.

299 It seems that there are only three types of lotus flowers in canonical parables. Perhaps the author is referring to the four types of noble beings here.

300 "Well proclaimed by the Blessed One is the teaching." The beginning of the traditional formula for reflecting on the qualities of the Dhamma.

301 "Battleship" is a children's game that is played with paper and pencils. It involves guessing and speculating. The same holds true for the translation of มัจฉากัจฉ้อ, an ancient term not to be found in normal dictionaries. Venerable Lā's pun seems to refer to a corrupted version

of "the fish guessing game" where "the black and red squares got mixed up". The game itself makes use of riddles and puns. It is not surprising that no-one seems to play or even know of it nowadays.

302 Manifold heart, manifold Dhamma.

303 Here, Luang Pū plays with terms from the Mahā-Paṭṭhāna, the seventh book of the Abhidhamma, but treats them as if they had been naturalized in Thai (as can be seen from the spelling). He thus gives them new meaning and a new context. An adept of the Abhidhamma would likely be horrified. But such people would probably rarely concern themselves with Khrū Bā Ācān Dhamma.

304 It is probably unnecessary to mention that these terms are not found anywhere in Pāli literature. They are Luang Pū's own coinages.

305 The eleven links of dependent co-arising that follow avijjā, ignorance: formations, consciousness, name-and-form, (sense) base, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, being, birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

306 "Connecting consciousness"; this commentarial term is usually understood as consciousness at the moment of rebirth, but Luang Pū Lā emphasises once again that birth and death are present *now*.

307 In Thai: "Thammniam [ธรรมเนียม, custom, tradition, practice] reads as Thamm-niam [Dhamma-niam]." The second syllable *niam* is the name of a medicinal plant when it stands alone. We cannot know whether Luang Pū was alluding to the similarity with the Pāli word *niyāma* (prescribed procedure, order). But it could well be, because he was certainly familiar with the term *Dhammaniyāma*. In any case, we do know that he liked to play with words. The wordplay in the chapter heading is Dhammniam and Dhammavinay in Thai.

308 A Thai proverb: it is about the confusion between good and evil, love and hate, kindliness and being threatening.

309 These details about the path of a *bodhisatta** seeking Buddhahood are taken from the commentary to various books of the Khuddaka Nikāya, the Shorter Collection. The prediction of success mentioned must be made by a current Buddha in order to be effective. The three types of bodhisattas, classified according to their predominant characteristics, each require a different number of asaṅkheyyas and mahākappas to

attain Buddhahood. For more details, please consult Apadāna Aṭṭhakathā 1.1.2, 117 ff. and Sutta Nipāta Aṭṭhakathā 1.3, 6.

310 That means, they postpone their striving to some time in the uncertain distant future.

311 These terms are additional qualifiers relating to arahantship:

Etadagga is a top student who is the best in a certain quality, for example in quick-wittedness (see Aṅguttara Nikāya, The Book of the Ones, Etadaggavagga).

"A *sukkhavipassako* is one who does not attain jhānas and only attains [the path and fruit] with insight as their vehicle." (Visuddhimagga Aṭṭhakathā 2.21). According to the Buddha's teaching as handed down in the suttas, such a thing is not provided for or, better said, impossible. But of course, one can wish for it.

A *tevijjo* has attained the threefold knowledge, i.e. in addition to the knowledge of the destruction of the āsavas, which is the minimum qualification for arahantship, they also have the memory of previous births and the knowledge of the reappearance of beings (divine eye).

A *chaḷabhiñño* has three additional kinds of higher knowledge: magical powers, the divine ear, and the ability to read the minds of other beings.

According to Paṭisambhidāmagga 3.1.1, a *paṭisambhidappatto* is one who possesses the sixteen kinds of wisdom described there. The definition derived from the scriptural discourses: one who possesses the four kinds of analytical knowledge.

312 But even in the very first Thai print version, the publishers had already acted contrary to the author's assumption. Apparently there is only one edition in Thai that does *not* contain any pictures. The English version here follows this trend.

313 They ask, "Are there really วิญญาณ (viññāṇ)?" The word *viññāṇ* (from Pāli *viññāṇa*) has undergone a broadening of meaning in the Thai language and now has three levels of meaning: 1. Consciousness (the presence of the experienced; the original meaning); 2. soul (based on the assumption of a permanent consciousness as the core of a being); 3. spirit, ghost (a wandering soul). A question of this kind almost certainly refers to the third meaning, but Luang Pū does not engage with

it and brings it back to the original meaning: is there really consciousness?

314 This proverb refers to characteristics that members of a group use to identify each other, but which are completely irrelevant in and of themselves, such as being a fan of a particular football club.

315 The message between the lines is a rejection of scholastic models of explanation of paṭiccasamuppāda, which Luang Pū had once learned as a young monk. These models describe a temporal sequence of the various links in the chain as an "explanation" of rebirth. Here it is about a timeless dependent co-arising between ignorance, its manifestations as greed, hatred and delusion, and suffering. Not recognising dependent co-arising is identical to dependent co-arising itself. In the language of the scriptural discourses: if this is (namely ignorance), then that too is (namely all the rest of craving and suffering). For example.

316 *Sandiṭṭhiko* and *paccattaṁ* are therefore not independent facts, but rather characteristics of a Dhamma that has been realised as truth, true for the one who has realised it. For worldlings, there is no such certainty about where they stand according to Dhamma.

317 *Cetasikā*, the mental factors referred to are the domain of scholars who study the Abhidhamma scriptures. They are proponents of explanatory models according to which "mental moments" appear one after the other in rapid succession, like pearls on a string. Luang Pū even counters them in their realm with the structural, non-temporal model (the image of weaving, an interwoven structure).

318 Luang Pū refers to the manifestation of the body as, or in, or through the wind element. See the tetrads of mindfulness of breathing, for example in the Ānāpānassati Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 118: "'Experiencing the whole body, I will breathe in,' thus he practises."

319 This term is usually understood to mean "high birth" or "long life".

320 In Thai, satellites are called "artificial stars", *dāo thiam*. The "dance mask" is a metaphor for self identification; it certainly is an expression of the conceit "I am", but, in this case here, there is no intention to deceive others involved.

321 The fourth realm is missing from the list here: the Asuras, or demons.

322 An idiom in Thai: “sometimes like this, sometimes like that”. At the same time, it is an allusion to the widespread “practice” in which amulets and holy images play an important role.

323 The original coinages and word plays that Luang Pū used in Thai have not been adapted literally here. And it does not make sense to quote them here.

324 Literally in Thai: *upekkhā* and *upekhwāng* (upe-obstruction).

325 Sanantana, “long-standing.” The quotation that appears in Dhammapada verse 5 and in several other verses in the Middle-length Discourses and Grouped Discourses is sometimes translated as “This is an eternal law.” For reasons of metre, this may be acceptable.

326 “Something good” (*khõng dī*) has two meanings in Thai: 1.) “something good”; 2.) “magical object, amulet, holy water, magic spells”. For example.

327 Luang Pū La’s simply brilliant way of describing the endlessly receding nature of self-contemplation. When I view “myself” as impermanent mental processes that are not suitable for identification, then attachment to the “observer” of these processes arises. Then I “am” the one who is observing myself.

328 This is an allusion to Phra Mahā Seng’s edition of *Muttodaya*, which has already been criticised on page 176.

329 In later editions, Venerable Lā added a few pages to his autobiography.

330 A festival on the new moon of the tenth lunar month. It is of Brahmin origin, but has undergone a reinterpretation in Thailand: rice pudding is cooked at the time of the new rice harvest. This is served to the monks. The merit is then dedicated to the deceased. According to an alternative explanation, the festival dates back to King Bimbisāra, who dedicated merit to petas (hungry ghosts). The Sāth festival is not particularly popular these days.

331 He mentions this specifically because, strictly speaking and according to the Vinaya, novices do not have to determine the rains residence. But, they participate as a sign of harmony and belonging.

332 Honey rice pudding. This term does not appear in the canon in this context. It does come up in the verses of liberated monks, Theragāthā.

333 This is a polite way of saying "teachers without their own realisation in the Dhamma." The literal meaning based on the origin of the words is "any teacher, anyone-Ācān." It is not clear whether Luang Pū Lā is referring to the authors of the writings mentioned or to those who raise objections.

334 It can be found in the first chapter of the collection of inspired sayings (Udāna) and in Pāli it reads as *vimuttisukhapaṭisaṁvedī*. The problem arises because those who objected overlooked the fact that the "conceiving oneself as a partaker" is missing. That is the crux of the matter. For Luang Pū Mun, the point was that identification is wrong. The Buddha was able to experience happiness without making a partaker out of it.

335 See Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16

๏ นะโมเมสัพพพุทธานัง
นะโมเมสัพพ์สัจจธัมมานัง
นะโมเมสัพพสังฆานัง

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